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Allegiances

FLAMECLAN

Leader

BURNINGSTAR - reddish she-cat with white paws, tail-tip, and piercing green eyes

Deputy

POUNCEFLIGHT - beautiful golden brown she-cat with unusually long whiskers and respectful hazel eyes

Healer

ODDBLAZE - red and white tom with a cream-tipped tail that and green eyes

APPRENTICE, TWITCHPAW

Messenger

SMOKEFLIGHT - agile silvery gray tom with two white forepaws and brilliant green eyes

Warriors

TIGERNOSE - red and white she-cat with blazing amber eyes

APPRENTICE, REEDPAW

THORNFLAME - creamy she-cat with one missing ear and yellow-green eyes

RUNNINGFOX - creamy tom with kind and bright yellow eyes

Apprentices

REEDPAW - swift sandy-colored tom with dark brown stripes down

his legs and tail as well as focused silver-blue eyes

TWITCHPAW - sandy and white she-cat with anxious amber eyes

Queens

None.

Elders

BRANCHBERRY - wiry orange tabby she-cat with bright blue eyes and a stub tail

SKYSTREAK - large long-furred orange she-cat with gentle green eyes

Kits

None.

CLIFFCLAN

Leader

RAINSTAR - long-legged reddish-brown she-cat with blazing amber eyes

Deputy

BADGERCLAW - muscular dusky brown she-cat with sharp green eyes

Healer

PETALWISH - long-tailed dark orange she-cat with soft green eyes

Messenger

SKYRUNNER - pure white tom with huge paws and amber eyes

Warriors

STONESHADE - lithe mottled brown tom with amber eyes

LEAFPOUNCE - golden tabby tom with glistening amber eyes

BRANCHTAIL - creamy brown tom with soft amber eyes

STRIKESTORM - muscular gray and white tabby tom with suspicious yellow-green eyes

Apprentices

None.

Queens

None.

Elders

JUNIPERNOSE - creamy-brown tabby tom with wise yellow eyes

BRACKENPOUNCE - brown tabby she-cat with yellow-green eyes

Kits

None.

BREEZECLAN

Leader

LIGHTNINGSTAR - fluffy bluish-gray tom with pale yellow eyes

Deputy

WOLFCALL - light gray she-cat with a blue-gray face, tail, paws, and bright blue eyes

Healer

SWALLOWFLOWER - black and gray tom with pale-yellow eyes

CLOUDYSKY - pale gray she-cat with a scar over one of her brilliant blue eyes

Messenger

FINCHFROST - smoky black cat with bright green eyes

APPRENTICE, FLEETPAW

Warriors

POUNCEHEART - gray and white tom with gray-green eyes

APPRENTICE, SUNPAW

HAZELSTRIPE - orange and white tabby tom with cautious yellow eyes

APPRENTICE, SLOWPAW

Apprentices

SUNPAW - light orange tom with a jagged white marking on his chest and yellow eyes

SLOWPAW - light brown tabby tom with bright yellow eyes

FLEETPAW - light brown she-cat with a cream-colored chest and underbelly as well as dark green eyes

Queens

LITTLELIGHT - Dark gray and white she-cat with glittering blue eyes

Elders

MEADOWSONG - swift brown and cream she-cat with kind yellow-green eyes

Kits

CLEVERKIT - white she-cat with yellow-orange eyes

THUNDERKIT - brown and white tabby tom with hazel eyes

FIERCEKIT - gray and white tabby tom with dark blue eyes

STREAMCLAN

Leader

MOONSTAR - pinkish-gray tom with pale orange eyes

Deputy

SHARPSWIPE - short-tailed light tortoiseshell tom with one blind eye

APPRENTICE, QUICKPAW

Healer

SPARROWSHINE - brown tom with yellow eyes

Messenger

SWIFTSCORCH - lithe brown tabby she-cat with yellow-green eyes

Warriors

OAKSHINE - light brown tabby she-cat with yellow-orange eyes

SHORTSTORM - light gray she-cat with glistening blue-green eyes

SHININGSOUL - massive and muscular dark brown tom with dark amber eyes and bulging muscles that ripple beneath his shiny coat

APPRENTICE, KEENPAW

HERONCLAW - russet and white she-cat with determined blue eyes

APPRENTICE, MISTPAW

Apprentices

QUICKPAW - sandy brown and white she-cat with amber eyes

MISTPAW - gray and white she-cat with large yellow eyes

KEENPAW - silver tom with sparkling blue-green eyes

Queens

None.

Elders

SMALLSTONE - cream-colored tom with gray stripes and bright blue eyes

SPRUCEBRANCH - skinny blue tom with blind yellow eyes

Kits

None.

CLANLESS CLOWDER

MUMBLE - unusually small pinkish-orange and white tom with green eyes

APPRENTICE, FLINT

FROST - silver she-cat with dappled gray spots and pale-yellow eyes

APPRENTICE, BADGER

LYNX - mottled light brown and gray tom with bright green eyes who wears an odd band around his neck

APPRENTICE, TINY

WOLF - long-tailed gray and white tom with amber eyes

APPRENTICE, FOX

GRASS - brown tabby tom with white paws and tail tip as well as yellow-green eyes

APPRENTICE, FEATHER

Apprentices

FEATHER - light brown tabby tom with shining green eyes

FLINT - light gray she-cat with large amber eyes

FOX - red tabby she-cat with a large scar on her back

BADGER - black tom with sparkling amber eyes

TINY - blue-gray she-cat with yellow-orange eyes

CODE:

Defend your clan, even with your life. You may have friendships with cats from other clans, but your loyalty must remain to your clan, as one day you may meet them in battle.

Do not hunt or trespass on another clan's territory.

Elders, queens, sick or injured cats, and kits must be fed before apprentices and warriors. Unless they have permission, apprentices may not eat until they have hunted to feed the elders.

Prey is killed only to be eaten. Give thanks to SpiritClan for its life.

A kit must be at least six moons old to become an apprentice.

A gathering of all four clans is held at the full moon during a truce that lasts for the night. There shall be no fighting among clans at this time and the cats of the Clanless Clowder are to be respected as they try to maintain the peace.

Boundaries must be checked and marked daily. Challenge all trespassing cats.

No warrior can neglect a kit in pain or danger, even if the kit is from a different clan.

An honorable warrior does not need to kill other cats to win their battles unless they are outside the warrior code or if it is necessary

for self-defense.

A warrior rejects the soft life of a kittypet.

Each clan has the right to be proud and independent, but in times of trouble, they must forget their boundaries and fight side by side to protect the four. Each clan must help the others so that no clan will fall.

A cat may have a mate who is a part of a different clan as long as they remain loyal to their own clan.

Healers may have kits as long as they have an apprentice or another medicine cat to take up their duties while they're in the nursery.

Members of the Clanless Clowder shall not take a mate so the immortality that has been granted will not be disrupted.

Clanless Clowder members should not be biased to a certain clan at any moment.

Prologue

A brown tabby tom continued to creep among the dense undergrowth that made up their territory. His yellow-green eyes were set on a familiar black and white figure, its pelt glinting in the light of the almost full moon. *What is he doing?* The tabby wondered silently to himself, watching as the tom stopped abruptly, almost running into something. The brown tom was about to jump out of his hiding place, worried the shadowy object was a fox or a badger, but as he squinted and let his eyes adjust to the darkness, he realized it was another cat. He couldn't make out the newcomer's features in the darkness of the night though, as the towering trees above him blocked out most of the moonlight that shone down on the forest. Luckily, the brown tabby was just close enough to hear them once they began to speak with one another. *Maybe I can figure out what he's up to by listening to their conversation.* He thought to himself, pricking his ears.

"It's been nearly a moon! Where have you been all this time?" By the tone of voice, the watching tom could tell the strange new cat was female.

"I'm sorry. I've just been... busy." It seemed as if the black and white tom couldn't think of what to say after he trailed off for a moment. But the brown tom was relieved this strange cat wasn't aware of what was going on among the clans, as well as their clowder.

"Busy with what? You're a wild cat. The only things you'd have going on would be hunting and surviving!" She snapped. "But that wouldn't take up an entire *moon*! You must have *tons* of time on your paws!"

The black-spotted tom flinched slightly at her words. "You shouldn't be so loud," he told her in a hushed mew. "You never know who could be listening to you." A chill went down the brown tabby's spine as he spoke. Did he know the tom was spying on him?

He quickly shook the thought away. *How would he know? I've been*

silent this entire time. He even masked his scent by rolling in the dirt and leaves of the forest after realizing how suspicious the white tom seemed before he left the flower-filled hills that they called their home. The tabby concluded he was probably just cautious of any wolves or foxes that may have been around at the time. After all, they were known to mostly be active at night, and BreezeClan was filled with them, whether the strange she-cat was aware or not.

"Don't be silly." The she-cat's tone was still serious, reminding him of Thornflame, a FlameClan she-cat he had met when he was looking over each clan's kits to find a suitable successor among them. But why would the white tom be speaking to *her*? And in BreezeClan territory of all places? "What mouse-brain would be out at *this* time of night? That would just be *asking* to be eaten by a fox."

Yet here they are. The brown tabby thought. Fortunately, any smart predator would stay away from clan territory after scenting the number of cats that made up each clan. Although some didn't pay as well attention as others.

"Well, have you considered my offer?" She questioned after a long pause of silence between the two of them. The white tom looked to her sharply, meeting her blue gaze that pierced the darkness of the night.

"I-I..." The tom trailed for a second before letting out a heavy sigh. "Yes, I've made my decision," He finally told her. "I'd hate for those kits to not know their father, so I'll join you."

Confusion clouded his mind. Was he going to leave? Just like that? He hadn't even chosen an apprentice yet. As the five chosen cats in the Clanless Clowder, their SpiritClan ancestors had made it very clear that they weren't allowed to take a mate or have kits, as the immortality they were all granted would be disrupted and ultimately change their group's entire future. He wanted to jump out and stop his friend, but in the back of his mind, he knew such a decision would lead to a terrible outcome.

"Wise choice, Bounce. Now come on. We should get going as soon as possible." She told him, and it seemed to the tabby tom that the she-cat was worried Bounce would change his mind if they stayed

any longer. As the two cats padded on and out of clan territory, the brown tabby followed them for just a few more fox-lengths before he turned, taking one glance at his friend, knowing it would be the last he saw of the black and white tom.

Chapter 1

Petalpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

It was Petalpaw's first day outside of camp and she couldn't hide the excitement that glistened in her bright green eyes and tingled within her paws. Unfortunately, her mentor, Badgerclaw, didn't seem to enjoy her enthusiasm.

"Quit that!" She snapped at her, making Petalpaw flinch and cower as the muscular she-cat's gaze raked her dark orange pelt. She glanced at her paws in embarrassment, her ears drooping. Was it really so bad to show how much she had been anticipating her apprenticeship?

"S-Sorry," She stuttered as her mentor's head swung toward their destination once again before she continued into CliffClan territory. Petalpaw followed hesitantly. If her mentor wanted to make a terrible first impression on her apprentice, she had definitely succeeded. But as the orange apprentice followed her mentor, she couldn't help but gaze in awe at the towering rocky terrain before her, distracting her from her mentor's harshness. A few moments passed before her gaze was focused on a beautiful butterfly, its pretty orange and black wings fluttering above her. It didn't take long for Badgerclaw to notice that she wasn't paying attention though.

"Petalpaw! Eyes on me!" But the young apprentice was still lost in her distracted mind. "Mouse-brain! Focus!" It wasn't until her mentor cuffed her ears when she finally realized the dark brown, she-cat had been calling to her. With a sigh, she and Badgerclaw continued. It was the first day and *already* she was struggling. Was training to be a warrior *always* going to be so difficult for her? She sure hoped that would not be the case.

She tried her best to focus as her mentor showed her around

CliffClan territory, but she still found herself getting distracted by small things she'd catch sight of, receiving criticism from Badgerclaw moments later. But finally, they both returned to their clan's camp, and Petalpaw was relieved once she got to join her friend Leafpaw by the prey pile and get away from her disappointed and annoyed mentor.

"Petalpaw!" The kind apprentice greeted with a happy purr. "How was your first day as an apprentice?" The two of them were very similar in age, Leafpaw being just a moon older than herself.

"It went well," She lied. Although she'd like to tell him how she really felt about her mentor and her struggle to focus, she didn't want to embarrass herself in front of her fellow apprentice, especially since she desperately wanted to make friends with him as the only other cat around her age.

"I'm glad to hear that!" He told her, delighted. "I'm sure you'll be a great apprentice to Badgerclaw. She'd better be proud to have gotten such a kind and optimistic apprentice like you." Her heart warmed at his purr. If only Badgerclaw was as proud of her as Leafpaw assumed.

I'm such a mouse-brain for letting myself get distracted like that so many times. She thought to herself. *I made a terrible impression on my mentor.* She watched from afar as Rainstar, the CliffClan leader padded to Badgerclaw, conversing with the warrior. Just watching as they shared tongues made her anxiety soar like an eagle scanning the ground below, searching for a particular young apprentice to feast on. Her mentor was probably telling her leader about how much of a disappointment she was as Badgerclaw's new apprentice. She sighed, as Leafpaw's mentor, Stoneshade called for his own warrior in training, his amber eyes cheerful as they always were. Leafpaw dipped his head apologetically to her before bounding toward the mottled brown tom. She wished she was assigned to a mentor like Leafpaw's. Stoneshade was always encouraging and cheerful, and even better, he loved to joke around with his clanmates every once and a while. *I can do this.* She told herself. *It's the first day, that's all. By tomorrow she'll be in a better mood, and I'll try my best not to get distracted.*

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

It had been about a moon since she was apprenticed, but it hadn't gotten any better, as she once hoped it would. She limped into camp, her mentor following with her green eyes blazing in annoyance as always. "Have Junipernose check your forepaw." She growled, not even the slightest amount of care or concern in her voice. Petalpaw didn't say a word, trudging toward Junipernose's den, her three good paws feeling heavy.

"Petalpaw? Are you okay?" Immediately, the gentle cream and brown tom was at her side, helping her into a nest in the empty den and checking her forepaw within moments. "What happened?" He asked her, feeling her outstretched limb with one of his cream-colored front paws.

"I fell from one of the rocky hills trying to chase a rabbit." She informed him, the memory of her trying to climb up and reach the rabbit, resurfacing within her mind. *I was just obeying Badgerclaw's orders,* she wanted to say. *I just wanted to prove to her that I'm a good apprentice.* But she figured the tom wouldn't want to listen to her rant about trying to gain the approval of her harsh mentor.

"You're lucky it isn't broken, but it may be sore for a few days." He informed her before asking, "How's your apprenticeship going? I hope Badgerclaw isn't being *too* hard on you."

At that moment, all of the emotions she had been feeling during the entire moon she spent as an apprentice, came pouring out of her. "To tell you honestly, it hasn't been going that well. I just keep getting distracted by everything and Badgerclaw seems to hate me. Hunting is so hard and I can't even bear to kill any innocent prey! I just hate the terrified and painful squeals they make! I... If I knew becoming a warrior would be so hard, I would've changed my mind before my ceremony!" She cried, worried about how the healer would respond.

But Junipernose didn't seem annoyed or irritated with how she felt. Instead, he dipped his head to her apologetically. "I'm sorry you feel that way, but it isn't too late to change your mind," he mewed, tilting his head in proposal. "There's no doubt I'm getting older and

eventually I'll have to retire as an elder. If you don't desire to be a warrior, that's okay." He told her, licking her head in reassurance. "I could always inform Rainstar that you'd like to be *my* apprentice instead."

Petalpaw felt too stunned to speak for a moment, her jaws wide in shock. "Y-You'd really want *me* as your *apprentice*?" She asked, and Junipernose replied with a simple nod, giving her a cheerful smile. "Then, yes! I'd love to train as a healer!" She felt the skin beneath her fur grow warm as she realized that not all of her clanmates looked down on her and thought of her as worthless like her mentor did. In Junipernose's eyes, she was accepted for who she was.

I won't disappoint him. She thought to herself, determined to prove that she wasn't destined to become a warrior. *I wasn't meant to serve my clan in that position, but I can serve them just as well as their healer.*

Chapter 2

Keenkit

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Keenkit knew something was up the moment the strange light brown and gray tom strutted into the StreamClan camp. Many of his clanmates muttered and whispered things he couldn't hear from where he was, but they always looked toward him and his littermates while they conversed with each other.

It had been a day since the stranger, they all called Lynx, arrived in their camp, and he and his siblings were supposed to become apprentices later that morning. *But have plans changed?* He asked silently to himself. *Has our ceremony been postponed? Why is every cat acting so strange?* Ever since the strange cat's arrival, the clan members had been flashing the kits odd looks and Keenkit wasn't sure what they meant. Were they in trouble? Was there something wrong with them?

The sun was just past the horizon by the time Keenkit and his siblings came out of the nursery to play with one another. They were battle training and discussing what they would do as warriors of their clan every once in a while, only to leap back into their play-fights. It didn't last for very long though, and they all stopped once Lynx strode towards them. Keenkit tried his best to put on a brave face, puffing out his chest and narrowing his eyes. The strange tom looked bored and uninterested as his mother, Shortstorm had the three of them line up side-by-side. The silver tom sat with his tail wrapped around his paws, the tip twitching occasionally in concern. He first looked at Keenkit. His green eyes seem to analyze every tuft of fur that was present, and it sent uneasy tremors through him. Despite the shivers of nervousness, he felt, he met the large tom's gaze with determined and prideful eyes. But eventually, he moved on and did the same to his siblings, studying them with that cold and disinterested stare of his. Finally, seeming as if moons had passed of him looking over each kit, the gray and brown tom

pointed his tail at his sister, Tinykit.

"I'll take that one," he told Shortstorm, who gently licked her kit's small head once she noticed how fearful and tensed Keenkit's sister looked. Lynx then turned away, padding toward the StreamClan leader, Moonstar.

Not long after, when the sun was high in the sky, skinning down on the camp, the pinkish-gray leader leaped onto the stump of a tree that had fallen long ago, when the river near their camp flooded after heavy rainfall and washed its remnants away. It marked the center of their camp and was used by the clan leader when announcements or meetings were called. Lynx stood at the foot of the historical landmark. "All cats who are old enough to swim, gather around the Invincible Stump for a clan meeting!" The leader called, and Keenkit and his sister Mistkit found themselves to be some of the first cats to join their leader. Excitement pricked within his paw pads as the remaining cats gathered and Moonstar spoke again. "Today, Keenkit and Mistkit have reached the age of six moons and are to be apprenticed. Mistkit," he looked toward the gray and white she-cat, her yellow eyes shining with anticipation. "It is time for you to be apprenticed. From this day forward, until you receive your warrior name you will be known as Mistpaw and your mentor will be Heronclaw. I hope she will pass down everything she knows to her new apprentice." The tom paused, catching the russet and white she-cat's gaze as she stepped forward and touched her nose to Mistpaw's head. Soon enough, it was his turn, and he stepped forward as his leader called him, his blue-green gaze meeting his leader's pale orange gaze. "Shiningsoul, you are ready to take on an apprentice. You have received excellent training from Smallstone and have shown yourself to be a kind and helpful warrior. You will mentor this apprentice until he has shown he is ready to become a warrior." Shiningsoul nodded, stepping forward. "Keenkit, from this day until your warrior ceremony, you shall be addressed as Keenpaw!"

"Mistpaw! Keenpaw!" The cats who were assembled cheered the names of the two new apprentices. But Keenpaw couldn't help but feel worried for his sister who still clearly trembled in fear of her future. What had Lynx meant by saying that he chose her? Why

wasn't she made an apprentice like he and Mistpaw were? The questions that were pouring out of him came to a stop though as Moonstar invited Lynx to join him on the stump with a flick of his gray tail.

The strange cat dipped his head to the StreamClan leader and cleared his throat before speaking. "As most of you may know, the Clanless Clowder has decided the time has come for our members to choose apprentices!" He called, only making Keenpaw even more confused. "I'm sure you all are aware that Bounce has given his immortality to me in hopes I can choose an apprentice to pass it on to, and I won't let him down, even if I, as well as most of you, disagree with his sudden decision to live the rest of his life as a normal cat."

The gathered cats murmured their agreement with Lynx, whispering about how mouse-brained Bounce had been to make such a choice or how his actions had been questionable. But the matter didn't interest Keenpaw, and his focus quickly shifted back to Lynx.

"And so, this brings us to where we stand now." He continued. "Tinykit," he beckoned, "You have been selected as my apprentice and future member of the Clanless Clowder. With such a position, you must know that SpiritClan will rely on you to interpret the mysterious dreams and visions and maintain peace among all four clans. Do you promise to do the bidding of your ancestors?"

At first, the kit seemed too shocked and scared to speak, but drawing in a shaky breath she nodded. "I-I do,"

"Then you shall be stripped of your clan name and instead be known as Tiny. You will leave your clan and step onto the path of a member of the Clanless Clowder!"

"Tiny! Tiny!" Keenpaw's clanmates cheered around him, but he was too shocked to join in. This random and strange cat was just going to take his sister? For all he knew, this cat could murder his sister, or manipulate her to do terrible things! But Lynx and Tiny headed for the camp entrance as his clanmates left from where they were gathered around the tree stump. He could hear his mentor calling for him, but Keenpaw was too outraged and worried for his sister.

"Tiny!" He called, but the she-cat didn't seem to hear him over the commotion of StreamClan cats. "Tiny!" He called once again, just before the two cats disappeared. The silver tom was just about to chase after her sister to beg for her to stay when his new mentor intercepted him, quickly grasping his scruff to keep him from sprinting out of camp. "Let me go!" He yowled, trying his best to break free from the strong tom's grasp. But it was no use. With a sigh, he stopped struggling, Shiningsoul letting go of his scruff moments later, but poised and ready to grasp it once again if he attempted to leave once more.

"I know you're worried for her," his mentor told him in a gentle voice, "But she'll be fine." He licked his head with reassurance. "It's a great honor to be chosen as a Clanless Clowder apprentice, so you should be proud of her."

He nodded, but in the back of his mind, he knew he'd have to see it for himself before he believed that was true.

Chapter 3

Sunpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Sunpaw faced the larger apprentice, his gaze determined as he lunged, tackling his enemy to the forest floor. The larger light brown tom was able to throw Sunpaw off though, swiping at his shoulder with an outstretched paw, a blow strong enough to cause him to almost lose his footing before he was pinned down. The light orange tom struggled for a moment before growing still and accepting the fact he had been defeated.

"Great work, to both of you." Sunpaw heard his mentor, Pounceheart, murmur as his opponent, Slowpaw, let go of his hold on the fallen tabby apprentice. He no longer got embarrassed when the younger apprentice beat him, as he was used to it. Though Sunpaw was older than Slowpaw, the light brown tabby was a lot bigger in size, and often beat the skinnier challenger as a result. The first few times he sparred with Slowpaw had greatly shocked him, and he especially got frustrated when his clanmate's ego got to him. The other apprentice would always boast to his sister and his clanmates about how he was never defeated during training and constantly bragged about how great of a warrior he was bound to become. It really got on Sunpaw's nerves, though he never told Slowpaw directly.

"Alright, I think we'll end your training there," Hazelstripe, Slowpaw's mentor, informed. "You both should get some rest before the big night ahead of you."

As if he needed proof, he looked up into the wide cloudless blue sky, where the full moon made its subtle appearance, although it wasn't it's time to shine yet. Tonight, the clan gathering was supposed to take place, and both he and Slowpaw had received permission to go.

"You and your apprentice can go ahead, Stripes," Pounceheart told the orange and white warrior. "I'm gonna practice with Sunny some more."

Sunpaw rolled his eyes with an annoyed sigh but didn't let his mentor see. Or at least he thought that was the case because Pounceheart nudged his shoulder with his nose once Hazelstripe and his apprentice turned away to leave, although the young orange tom didn't look Pounceheart's way.

"Cheer up, Sunny," His mentor encouraged him. 'Sunny' was what Pounceheart liked calling him, and while Sunpaw despised his nickname, he never told the gray and white tom exactly how he felt. Similar to his relationship with Slowpaw. He didn't like the apprentice at all but would never say so to his face. He just didn't like to put others down. *Well, that and I'd like to make a good impression on my clanmates.* He thought to himself. "I promise I won't keep you from your buddies for too long." Sunpaw always felt that Pounceheart was similar to him. He knew he was terrible at fighting, but his mentor never directly told him the same. Instead, the cheery tom would just practice with him more. *But if he isn't hard on me soon, I'd make a terrible warrior when BreezeClan is faced with conflict.*

They started with some basic moves before getting a little more difficult, but Pounceheart always seemed to go easy on the young apprentice, which made Sunpaw quite disappointed when the gray and white tom wrapped up his training and escorted him back to camp.

Why does he treat me like some kit? He asked himself. *I wish I wasn't stuck with him as my mentor.* He was a nice cat and all, but his positive and optimistic attitude got on his nerves sometimes, and he was way too soft on Sunpaw. *I wonder if Lightningstar would let me switch mentors if I asked.* But how would his leader react? And there was no doubt Pounceheart would feel hurt if Lightningstar agreed.

Once he reached the BreezeClan camp, he immediately spotted Slowpaw, his chest puffed out and his head high as he shared tongues with his sister, Fleetpaw, and her mentor Finchfrost. He looked toward his mentor, who dipped his head in understanding,

watching as Sunpaw joined the other apprentices.

"And then I knocked him down with a swipe at his shoulder and in an instant, I proved myself victorious!" He purred as his sister caught sight of Sunpaw and thumped her light brown tail in greeting.

"Hey, Sunpaw! We were just talking about you!" She purred before taking another bite of her mouse. The young apprentice usually hung around her brother after her running drills and exercises, although they both tended to get in fights a lot with Fleetpaw's truculent attitude. "Slowpaw told me you were defeated in a single blow this time, but I highly doubt that's true." The messenger apprentice rolled her eyes.

"I uh—" But he was cut off by Slowpaw.

"It *is* true! Why do you never believe me?" He spat at her, but she cuffed one of his ears with her paw in response. "So much for a loyal sister!" He growled, eyeing the both of them with an annoyed glare.

"Now, now, you two," Finchfrost began, but before they could continue, Fleetpaw spoke up.

"I'm loyal!" She protested, "But only if you're nice to me." She spat, sticking her tongue out at him. "And you just happen to be one of the unkind cats in this clan."

With a sigh, Finchfrost grasped a scrawny frog from the prey pile and padded away, not wanting to get involved in an argument that broke out. Sunpaw tuned out his bickering clanmates as usual and chose a juicy-looking mouse, padding to the far side of camp to eat in peace. Or so he thought.

He hadn't even bitten into his prey yet when his mentor strode up to him, greeting him with his warm silver gaze. "Mind if I share with you, Sunny?" He asked, and Sunpaw answered with a brisk nod, not wanting to offend the warrior.

They spent their time in silence, eating the flavorful prey in only a

few hungry gulps. *I think this is the longest duration he goes without speaking during the day.* He thought to himself, kind of surprised that was within the tom's ability.

"These moons are going by pretty quickly," Pounceheart said after they finished eating. "You'll be a warrior soon enough," His silver gaze was transfixed on the BreezeClan camp, but Sunpaw's eyes were on his mentor. His tone was so serious and quiet, unlike he had ever heard it before. *I didn't know he could ever* be *serious.* The apprentice thought silently.

"Yeah," was all Sunpaw could muster, still astonished by Pounceheart's sudden change of attitude. They sat like that in silence for a while, the setting sun casting a warm glow over the camp. The time of the gathering would be upon them soon, and Sunpaw's excitement faded as he thought about the warrior, he was going to become at the rate he was going.

He was most definitely worried about his future.

Chapter 4

Twitchpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

I'm a lot like him. She thought to herself, watching as the red and cream tom's tail twitched nervously while he watched Thornflame limp into the den, her paw raised to avoid using it to walk. The senior warrior informed him of what happened, showing him her injured paw.

Her own heart was pounding in worry, but they both sighed in relief when Thornflame notified them that a thorn had gotten stuck in her paw pad. Nothing else. Both she and her mentor had extreme anxiety, always worried some cat would end up dying in their den once any cat got hurt or sick. But luckily, pulling a thorn out of a paw was a breeze compared to many other things they could've had to deal with instead.

Twitchpaw continued sorting herbs as she was before Thornflame approached the den. The sun was beginning to set, painting the sky and clouds with a variety of beautiful hues.

Twitchpaw loved sunsets and sunrises and always liked to fascinate herself with the weather when she had time to. But her job in the clan as a healer apprentice wasn't flexible at all, so she was mostly just able to watch the sky during the morning and evening before or after her duties. She'd have to miss watching the sun sink beneath the horizon that night though.

Almost the entire day, her mentor Oddblaze had been in CliffClan's camp, helping their clan's healer, Petalwish. Just recently an illness had affected some of the cats of the clan, although most were able to recover quickly, as it wasn't very severe. But eventually, after treating the ill cats of CliffClan, the young dark orange healer had fallen ill as well as a warrior and an elder in the clan and Oddblaze had been helping Petalwish almost the entire day. Twitchpaw had

her paws full the entire time he was gone, but she was relieved once the red and cream tom made it back.

I hope it won't be like this every day once Oddblaze isn't here to help me out. She thought, her pelt prickling in worry as she began to imagine having to do so much on her own. *How does Petalwish do it?*

Petalwish had only been a full healer for about four moons, and two moons after her apprenticeship ended, her mentor had retired. She carried a lot of responsibility in her clan for such a young cat and Twitchpaw really admired her for that very reason. They both seemed to get along pretty well considering all the times they had met once she became Oddblaze's apprentice. Twitchpaw would even hope they would make good friends one day.

I'll be a full healer soon enough. Twitchpaw realized as she finished stocking the last of the fresh herbs. *But Oddblaze is young, so I'll be able to keep everything under control by then.* She assured herself, but her whiskers twitched slightly in doubt. *Right?*

It was Thornflame who distracted her from her thoughts. "Well, since I have to stay off of my paw and can't come along with you two tonight, mind if you tell my good friend Pounceheart I said hello?" She asked the both of them.

"Sure, we can!" Twitchpaw purred. She had never spoken to the tom or even met him, but she always heard he was a great hunter who loved to joke around. She mostly knew about him because of the odd nicknames he'd give to the cats he met. *I wonder what he calls Thornflame since they're such good friends.*

That's when she heard Burningstar's yowl ring out to the clan, calling for the cats who were going to the clan gathering. Twitchpaw followed Oddblaze out of the den as they made their way to their leader. Smokeflight and Tigernose, two FlameClan warriors were already waiting, and there was only one cat who joined the gathered cats just behind Twitchpaw, who dipped her head respectfully upon realizing one of the elders, Branchberry.

It didn't take long for them to make their way to the hilly plains filled with various flowers and plants that Twitchpaw could name off the top of her head. The gathering place was where most of the healers relied on for the majority of the herbs they used, and the hills made for great places for clan leaders to sit and let each held gathering commence.

The only clan there once they arrived was CliffClan, their leader Rainstar waiting at the foot of one of the hills, her tail twitching to and fro in impatience. Burningstar greeted her with a dip of her head. "Rainstar, how have you been?"

Oddblaze and Twitchpaw didn't wait for a response though. Instead, they padded toward a young, innocent she-cat who was pawing gently at something on the ground. "Petalwish!" Twitchpaw purred, bounding up to the CliffClan healer. Petalwish took a quick look at the apprentice, smiling warmly, before returning her attention to whatever was on the grass beneath her.

Once Twitchpaw got closer though, she realized a small, shiny green beetle was on its back, and Petalwish was trying to help it back on its feet again. That was Petalpaw. Always wanting to help every creature, even the smallest of insects.

Finally, she was able to turn the beetle over with gentle paws and all three cats watched as it escaped into the undergrowth. The orange she-cat cast Twitchpaw and her mentor an apologetic glance. "Sorry, I just couldn't bear to watch it struggle like that."

Oddblaze parted his jaws to reply when the sound of pawsteps caught their attention. All three of them turned and spotted Lightningstar of BreezeClan striding into the clearing, some of his clanmates at her tail.

"Why don't you go speak with Pounceheart before the gathering starts," Oddblaze told her. The apprentice nodded, trying her best to remember what the tom looked like as she strode up to the arriving BreezeClan cats.

Then she spotted him, a gray and white warrior who was speaking with a younger light orange tom. She dipped her head politely to

him once he noticed her arrival. "Hey there!" He mewed. "You must be a friend of Sunny's."

Her amber eyes clouded with confusion as she struggled to find the words to reply to him with. "I uh," she took a glance at the orange tom who was at his side. "I'm sorry, but I don't know him very well. I actually came to speak to you." She recognized the younger cat from a few past gatherings, but couldn't quite remember his name. *Sunny probably. But I don't know the rest of his name.* She thought. *Sunnypaw?* She took a deep breath, trying to bring her attention back to the cats before her. She would most likely find out his name soon enough. "Thornflame ironically got a thorn stuck in her paw pad right before the gathering and couldn't come." The sandy she-cat informed. "She just wanted me to tell you she said hello and hopes you're doing well."

"Ah, well thank you!" He purred. "Say, what's your name?" He asked her.

"Oh. I-I'm Twitchpaw," she answered, worried about what silly name he would give to her.

"Hmm. Twitchpaw..." His voice trailed off as if trying out the name. His eyes brightened before he opened his jaws to speak again. "How about I call you Twitch instead." He decided. "I'm sure you and Sunny here will get along just fine." He said, nudging the orange tom who let out an annoyed sigh. "Anyways, I'm going to greet some of the other warriors. You two get along now."

Twitchpaw watched as he left, his paws seeming to bounce with every step. Sunny looked up at her sheepishly. "S-Sorry. My mentor can be kind of annoying sometimes..." He mewed, his ears still drooping in embarrassment.

"That's okay," She told him, an awkward silence following. "So, uh, I never caught your *actual* name." She said to him finally.

"Oh, right." He gave his chest fur a few embarrassed licks before answering. "I'm Sunpaw. You're that healer apprentice, right?" He asked, and Twitchpaw felt ashamed for not knowing his name when Sunpaw had clearly remembered who she was.

"Yeah, I am. I'm Oddblaze's apprentice." She answered. She was disappointed she had to leave Petalwish to talk to Pounceheart, but at least she got to meet the orange tom. He seemed nice, and he had to be around her age if he was an apprentice.

"Wow, I didn't know you had a mate already." A tom called from behind Twitchpaw. She turned to see a larger light brown tabby making his way towards the both of them. "Just wait until she finds out how weak and mousse-brained you are."

The she-cat's jaw dropped. How could any cat be so disrespectful? But Sunpaw just rolled his eyes, looking away as the new tom approached. "I-I'll get going then," Twitchpaw told both cats. "I should get back to Oddblaze and the other healers."

Just as she began to leave, she could hear the other tom still making fun of Sunpaw, but she didn't want to interfere and get into conflict. He was huge compared to both her and the light orange apprentice and if the clans were to ever get in conflict, she could be a target to him as a vulnerable clan member.

Just as she reached the other healers who were waiting patiently at the foot of one of the hills, StreamClan made their arrival. "Took them long enough," Swallowflower of BreezeClan muttered under his breath. The black and gray BreezeClan healer was the oldest of all of them, though no cat, even his apprentice, knew why he hadn't retired as an elder yet. Twitchpaw didn't like him very much, even if he did seem like a very loyal cat to his clan. It wasn't that he was mean to her or anything, she just didn't like how grumpy he always seemed.

Her focus on Swallowflower faded though once she heard Rainstar's yowl. "Let's get on with this gathering, mouse-brains!" She snapped from the top of one of the hills at the three leaders below her, who were still sharing tongues and other cats who were from different clans. Burningstar was the first cat to join the CliffClan leader, Moonstar and Lightningstar climbing up straight after her, both exchanging a glance that Twitchpaw couldn't quite read.

Right after all four leaders were standing, looking down on their clanmates, hushed murmurs faded into silence as the gathering

began.

Chapter 5

Tiny

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Tiny and the other apprentices in the clowder stood side by side in front of the hill near the four clan deputies, their mentors standing right behind them. Their purpose in the gathering was to keep the peace between the cats so SpiritClan didn't have to send clouds to cover the moon and declare their disapproval, ending the gathering much earlier than most cats would like.

An uneasy silence fell under the cats as Rainstar cleared her throat. Tiny knew her opinions on each clan and the cats in them were supposed to stay neutral, but so far, she didn't like the CliffClan leader at all. Her blazing amber eyes and irritated remarks made a shiver go down the small apprentice's spine and wasn't appealing at all to her. *I wonder how the cats of CliffClan put up with her.*

"CliffClan is doing well as always. Abundant prey running within our borders and no sign of predators or trespassers." The she-cat took a step back to eye the other three leaders, waiting for one to step forward and speak next. After a few heartbeats, her former leader Moonstar spoke up.

"I'm glad your clan is thriving, Rainstar. StreamClan is also doing quite well, although we did spot a fox on the edge of our border near BreezeClan. We chased it away, but I would watch out for it in case it takes cover in your territory, Lightningstar."

Uneasy whispers spread among some of the cats, likely the members of BreezeClan, but they were quickly silenced when Lightningstar opened his jaws to speak. "Thank you for warning us, Moonstar. We wouldn't want to run into another fox unexpectedly and experience serious injuries like the last time."

Many cats murmured in agreement, although Tiny didn't know

what he meant by his statement. She didn't know much about what went on in each clan, as that was her first gathering in her life, but she continued to listen. "Yes, what happened to Cloudysky was shocking to all of us. Sight is very important to a clan cat." Burningstar meowed in reply.

Tiny searched the gathered cats, but she didn't know who Cloudysky was. And if the cat was chosen to go the gathering, it certainly wasn't obvious that they had damaged eyes. "We also have two new apprentices, Mistpaw and Keenpaw, and our other kit, Tiny has been chosen as an apprentice of the Clanless Clowder!" Moonstar announced.

"Mistpaw! Keenpaw! Tiny!" The gathered cats cheered their names and Tiny couldn't help but feel a twinge of pride.

As the cheers died down, Burningstar stepped forward. "We don't have very much to report either. Now that the weather is warming up and the harsh winter has passed, the twolegs in our territory are coming out of their dens more often and our cats are having to be extremely careful that they don't catch us."

The apprentice had heard about FlameClan's unfortunate settlement when they had no luck finding territory elsewhere and were too lazy to search for new land themselves. "If you ever need to do so, you can always come join us in StreamClan. We have plenty of room in our caves and you could always join patrols alongside our warriors." Moonstar told the reddish she-cat.

"Thank you for your offer, but I'm afraid I'll have to decline. FlameClan has lived through this countless times before and will do so again. We can handle ourselves just fine." She replied, and from where Tiny watched the leaders, she could see Burningstar's fur bristling slightly, but within a few moments it lay flat once again.

"Well, if you ever change your mind—" But Moonstar was cut off by a hiss from Burningstar.

"My decision is final! We don't need help from any other clans!" Tiny could tell she was trying to keep herself calm, but the anger she felt was beginning to get the best of her. She barred her teeth at

the leader, her unsheathed claws digging into the grass atop the hill.

That's when Mumble of the Clanless Clowder stepped forward. "Okay, let's drop the subject. It seems FlameClan doesn't need help."

Rainstar rolled her eyes with a sigh. "Why is it that the other cats leading these clans act like a bunch of mouse-brained *kits*?" She growled.

"At least I offered to help," Moonstar replied. "You're the closest clan to them, yet you don't seem to care!"

"I have my *own* clan to take care of, thank you very much!" She snarled; her hackles raised.

Finally, Fox, one of the Clowder's apprentices spoke up. "Cut it out! All of you!" She yowled. "If we want the gathering to continue, we can't go on arguing like this!"

"What do you know?" Rainstar sneered. "You're just an apprentice after all!"

Fox's fur bristled at her remark, but her mentor, Wolf hissed at her in warning and she backed down with a glance of angry disappointment. But Frost stuck up for the red tabby apprentice. "She's right! If you all keep this up, SpiritClan will end the gathering!"

At that, the three arguing leaders went silent and all Tiny could hear was the hushed mews of the gathered cats below the hill. No cat spoke until Rainstar got to her paws and leaped down the hill. "CliffClan's leaving! I've had enough of this group of SpiritClan-adoring *rogues* telling us what to do for the night!"

Most of the CliffClan cats seemed hesitant at first, but they all eventually followed their leader away from the flower field and towards the valley where their camp was.

Lightningstar, who had pretty much stayed silent during the entire argument between the leaders broke the silence that followed Rainstar's sudden departure. "Now that she's gone, I heard a rumor

that a strange illness recently hit CliffClan this moon, although she never mentioned anything."

Burningstar nodded. "I heard that as well. Our healer cat Oddblaze had to help Petalwish earlier today because of said illness." From within the crowd of cats she spotted the reddish tabby healer nod his head in agreement. A few cats murmured their confusion as Moonstar spoke.

"How odd she never mewed anything about it, especially since she sought help from FlameClan." Tiny had to admit that it was surprising, as Rainstar didn't seem like the type to ask for help. "It must've been very serious, but I hope their clan members are all okay now."

"Yes. Rainstar can be a bit... er... *impolite*, but SpiritClan shouldn't punish the entire clan for her actions..." Lightningstar mewed.

"I think FlameClan will take their leave now," Burningstar dipped her head to the other two leaders. "Until the next full moon. And may SpiritClan light your path."

Moonstar and Lightningstar nodded. "StreamClan as well." The pinkish tom replied. "Until next moon, Burningstar. And to you too, Lightningstar."

As the gathering broke apart and the clowder returned to their dens, Tiny couldn't help but think how grateful she and all the cats of the clans should be that most of the leaders were peaceful. Hopefully no cats would have to suffer the bloodshed and loss of a battle for many lifetimes. She hadn't experienced any battles herself, but even as a kit she always hoped it would never happen while she lived. *And it won't.* She assured herself. *I'm an apprentice of the Clanless Clowder now, one of the cats who keeps the peace between the clans and obeys the will of SpiritClan no matter what.* She closed her eyes as her thoughts wandered on, hoping she'd eventually fall asleep. *I won't let any of the clans get into long-lasting conflict. I was chosen to fulfill this role, so I won't let any cat down.* That was the last thought she remembered as her mind drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter 6

Petalwish

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Petalwish examined the CliffClan warrior and elder carefully, making sure the illness they had caught just the day before was letting up as hers had.

Junipernose seemed to be doing well after his treatment, but unlike the elder, Leafpounce was still suffering from the sickness and it hadn't seemed to be getting better just yet. The young healer was patient though. All of her clanmates who had ended up catching it ended up recovering within a few days if not less, so she was sure as long as she kept up his treatment, he would be fine.

She was lucky that Oddblaze had been willing to help her out when she caught it. Without his assistance, she wasn't sure she'd be able to help her clanmates. She was even more surprised that Rainstar let him help after his offer, although she kept a close eye on him throughout the day.

Her herb store was running low though she noticed as her gaze drifted to the floor of the den. She hadn't even thought of gathering more while she was out the night before. She'd have to go out and retrieve more at some point during the day.

She trotted to the den's entrance, hoping Rainstar would approve of her making the trip much earlier to avoid running out of herbs as the day went on. Fear coursed through her veins as she approached the leader's den. The she-cat who led the clan could be mean and strict about what went on in CliffClan. But what made it worse was that Rainstar was her mother and ever since she decided to become a healer instead of a warrior, the she-cat disapproved of Petalwish.

She was greeted by Badgerclaw, the clan's deputy, giving her a scornful glare. The brown she-cat used to be her mentor while she

was training as a warrior apprentice. Of course, she eventually became a healer apprentice instead, but Badgerclaw never seemed to forgive her for her decision.

Not all of her clanmates hated her though. Her former mentor, Junipernose seemed to like her and so did Leafpounce and Stoneshade, two of the clan's warriors.

"Rainstar?" She called to a reddish-brown she-cat who was perched just in front of the leader's den. The long-legged tabby turned and rested her blazing amber eyes on her daughter, and Petalwish thought she could see a flicker of annoyance cross her gaze for just a moment.

"What is it Petalwish?" Her mother's voice came in a low and irritated growl, but Petalwish was used to the leader's tone of voice.

"I just wanted to ask for your permission to gather herbs. My store is growing low and I'd hate for them to run out if a warrior gets injured or sick." She explained.

"Fine, go ahead." Was all she replied, flicking her tail at her, dismissively.

Petalwish's eyes grew wide in surprise. It was rare for the short-tempered she-cat to agree to something so quickly. She dipped her head in gratitude before bounding out of camp and towards the flower-covered hills where the gatherings were held each full moon.

She travelled through FlameClan since the route was quicker, but happened to run into a patrol on the way. She recognized the deputy, Pounceflight at the front with Thornflame, Tigernose, and another much younger-looking cat among them that she didn't recognize. *That must be one of the apprentices.* She thought to herself as they approached her and by his pelt coloring, she figured it was Twitchpaw's brother, although she had forgotten his name.

"Ah, Petalwish. What brings you to FlameClan?" Pounceflight greeted her warmly and Petalwish, while loyal to her clan, wished CliffClan's deputy could be as nice as the three other clan deputies seemed.

"Hello Pounceflight. I'm just passing through to get to the gathering place." She dipped her head in submission.

"Well, I hope you can find what you're looking for then. I will have to send a cat to escort you out of our territory though, just in case." The young healer gave the patrol an understanding nod. "Reedpaw, why don't you lead Petalwish here. Just meet us back at camp while we finish establishing new scent markers."

The younger tom nodded obediently, stepping toward Petalwish and beckoning for her to follow him. With one last farewell to the warriors, the two cats took off toward the opposite border.

"So, you're CliffClan's healer. I don't think we've properly met yet." The apprentice began.

"No, I don't believe we have, but your sister has mentioned you a few times to me during gatherings. It's nice to meet you." She replied.

"It's nice to meet you as well." They continued exchanging small conversations and before she knew it, they had made it to the border, the tall hills of the flower forest towering over the terrain, the brilliant sunlight casting looming shadows across the land.

With a thankful nod to Reedpaw, they both went their separate ways and departed from one another. The beautiful landscape was very quiet and the soft songs of birds filled her ears as she began gathering the herbs she needed. Crickets chirped nearby and a faint breeze rustled her fur. The chosen cats for the Clanless Clowder were lucky to live in such a peaceful area.

She was almost done gathering the needed plants and flowers when the sound of growling came from somewhere nearby. She parted her jaws to taste the air, but the scent she caught wasn't another cat as she had hoped.

It was a predator, and not just any, but a large strong wolf that could easily kill her in an instant. She tried to calm herself. Maybe it wasn't as nearby as she thought it was. If she was quick and made it out of the flower forest, the chance of it spotting her were low.

But just as she turned to head back the way she came, she saw it. A large gray wolf, its hackles raised and its jaws barred into a savage snarl.

Chapter 7

Keenpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Keenpaw raced across the marshes, keeping his narrowed blue-green eyes on the bounding rabbit ahead of him. Its legs pumped in desperation as it ran for its life, but Keenpaw was on the prey's heels, his mouth-watering as its scent caught his nostrils.

He gathered all of his energy in his muscles and sprang forward, lunging at the creature with outstretched paws. His claws hooked into the rabbit's fur, but it was able to escape his grasp within an instant, leaping away, far out of his reach.

"Fox-dung," he cursed under his breath, letting out an irritated hiss. It had been about a moon after his sister left the clan and the night before had been the gathering. But of course, he was too young to go, and he hated not knowing what his sister was up to.

He let out a sigh as he heard heavy pawsteps come from behind him. His other sister Mistpaw had been lucky enough to have Heronclaw as her mentor. The russet and white she-cat's daughter was in the Clanless Clowder just like Tiny and he overheard some of the conversations they would have about the group of cats.

He and his mentor didn't have much of a bond, and Keenpaw even found himself afraid of the massive, thickset tom. He didn't seem like a bad cat, but he knew if he ever got in a fight with the massive warrior, he'd be doomed. Shiningsoul had large, pointed claws and huge teeth that could leave any cat severely injured.

"I almost had it," he growled, his ears were low in shame as he stared down at his paws, avoiding his mentor's gaze.

But the large warrior only gave him a gentle lick on his shoulder. "Hey, don't be ashamed. It happens to every cat, even skilled

warriors like myself." He assured. "It takes quite a while to get the hang of hunting."

Keenpaw gathered enough courage to lift his eyes. His whiskers twitched and his heart fluttered with new hope. He wondered if Mistpaw had any luck hunting. Was the gray and white apprentice struggling as much as he was?

He shook the thought away. There was no time for him to think about such things. He had to focus on his own tasks. He had to get better at hunting.

Not long after, he stumbled upon a squirrel who was feasting on something small in its tiny paws. It was oblivious of Keenpaw's presence, and he wanted to keep it that way. He positioned himself, laying low to the ground and keeping his tail straight out behind him to make sure his prey wouldn't hear him. Then he sprang, catching the creature in his paws. It let out a fearful shriek that was cut off by Keenpaw's fatal bite.

A surge of triumph ran through him. He'd done it! He had finally made his first kill!

"Well done, Keenpaw!" His mentor purred, stepping out of his hiding place where he kept an eye on Keenpaw's hunting while he avoided interfering. "Tiny would be proud of you."

Even her name made his heart twist with longing. He hoped the moons would pass quickly until Moonstar allowed him to go to his first gathering. *Then, I'll finally be able to know what Tiny's been up to!*

But his excitement faded when the crunching of leaves sounded from behind the two toms. They spun around, but there was nothing in sight. Then, an odd scent caught his nose and he dropped his catch, trying to make out the smell, but it was unfamiliar to Keenpaw. His mentor's amber eyes though flashed with grave recognition.

Trying to keep quiet, Shiningsoul crept behind a large overgrown bush. Vines and broken branches stuck out in every which way, but it kept the large cat unseen by whatever danger lurked nearby. He

made a gesture with his massive head for Keenpaw to follow, mimicking what Shiningsoul had done to stay silent.

He was careful to keep each pawstep inaudible. It was difficult and he held his breath with every movement he made, but eventually, he had made it to his mentor's side. Through the thick undergrowth, he could just make out ghostly yellow eyes, narrowed in fierce determination. Long gray fur followed as the large creature stepped out from the darkness of the overgrown marshes that had engulfed him.

It was large and thickset, like his mentor. But compared to this massive shadowy figure, Shiningsoul was like a mouse doomed to be trampled on. Keenpaw looked to the large cat who obviously recognized what was in front of him. As much as the apprentice wanted to ask questions, he had to stay quiet. If they were caught, they had no chance of escape.

The gray dog-like creature took its precious time to move on, sniffing warily at just about every spot he possibly could. Keenpaw's heart raced as it caught sight of the squirrel the tom had dropped. *Mouse-dung! That was* all he could think as the plump, fresh catch was wolfed down within a few bites. Within what seemed like moons, the strange creature had finally moved on, and the squirrel he had caught just moments before was nothing more than a bloody pile of bones and fur.

"What was that thing?" Keenpaw burst out, keeping his voice at a whisper in case of any slight chance the massive monster would hear them and race back.

"A wolf. They're spotted sometimes during spring." He informed. "As long as they don't spot you, you're safe." He nudged the apprentice along, padding back to camp. His heart dropped. He had been so excited to show off his squirrel, but now it was gone, and all of his pride and anticipation with it.

Chapter 8

Sunpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Pounceheart had been asked to join the border patrol and freshen the clan's scent markers and he of course insisted that Sunpaw would accompany the patrol. They were led by Wolfcall, and as if border patrol wasn't worse enough, Slowpaw and his mentor Hazelstripe was with them.

He hated marking the clan's borders. It was so boring to him and he felt it was a waste of energy with how often it was done. *But it beats battle training with Slowpaw I guess.* He thought although he would feel better if the annoying apprentice wasn't with him outside training.

"Why don't you go mark some of those trees, Sunny?" Pounceheart suggested once they had made it to the border. He gestured to where the forest ended, the line of trees thinning just before reaching the river where their border was.

"Yeah *Sunny,*" Slowpaw smirked, but Hazelstripe gave him a harsh glare that quickly made him snap his jaws shut.

"Go with him, Snail." The orange and white tom said, and Sunpaw had to put so much effort into holding back an amused laugh. Pounceheart had made nicknames for every cat in BreezeClan and 'Snail' was what he called Slowpaw. He was glad he had Hazelstripe there to back him up when Slowpaw would pick on him. He wasn't close to his father, but he definitely admired the warrior.

Both apprentices obeyed their mentors, padding to the trees to mark them. It didn't take very long and soon they were on their paws again to mark another area. Soon they made it to the border they shared with FlameClan to find there was a group of cats already there. He didn't know most of the cats in other clans, but he could

make out Thornflame taking the lead, with a red and white she-cat and a creamy tom close behind.

The only reason he knew Thornflame's name was because of her unforgettable irritated tone. He never knew why, but she always seemed annoyed and her tone was always low and serious when she spoke.

"Wolfcall," the she-cat greeted her tone the same as Sunpaw remembered.

"Thornflame!" The light gray she-cat greeted warmly. "How is FlameClan fairing now that the weather has warmed up?"

Sunpaw knew since it was no longer snow-fall, the twolegs near the FlameClan camp would be out more often and the cats would have to be very careful as they carried on with clan duties.

"Just fine, thanks." Although it didn't sound at all like the FlameClan warrior meant it. "Did you ever spot that fox Moonstar spoke of?" She asked, referring to last night's gathering.

Wolfcall shook her head. "No sign of it. I hope it was just passing through and won't be a threat to any clan." She said, and Hazelstripe nodded in agreement.

"Hopefully, but I'd keep an eye out just in case it happened to wander on to FlameClan," Pounceheart advised.

"Alright then, we'll leave you to your duties." Thornflame mewed with a nod. She assembled her two clanmates with a flick of her tail before strolling off.

"Be careful, Thorn," Pounceheart purred back to her before following his deputy to continue with his patrol.

That's right. He and Thornflame are friends. He thought to himself as he recalled his run-in with the FlameClan apprentice the night before. *Too bad he couldn't see her at the gathering.*

And so, they all continued marking the undergrowth to ensure no other cat would trespass. It wasn't very interesting to Sunpaw until

they made it to the StreamClan border. The land there was wet and spongy beneath his paws which bothered him, but not as much as the strange scent.

He recognized it within an instant, although it was stale. His fur bristled and he took a step toward his mentor, more comfortable at the side of a full-fledged warrior than by himself. Moonstar had been right when he informed them of the fox. The predator had definitely passed the border despite their scent marks.

"It's stale. We'll be careful, but don't fear. There's a high possibility it's long gone by now." Wolfcall meowed as she began renewing the markings and freshening the strong scents of BreezeClan.

Sunpaw kept close to Pounceheart as they moved on, but Slowpaw took notice of this. "You're such a scaredy-mouse!" He taunted. "Even if it *is* still here, we can take them!"

"Shh!" Hazelstripe hissed. "Even if it *is* still here," he said, mimicking the apprentice's words, "then we want to avoid it as much as possible. But if you keep up that yowling, it will most definitely find us!"

Slowpaw obeyed and didn't say another word, but he gave Sunpaw a mocking glare. Sunpaw kept close to his mentor as if daring the light brown tabby to tease him again. He didn't like Slowpaw's tantalizing behavior, but it was amusing to see him get scolded and embarrassed.

They were almost finished marking the border when the fox stench hit his nose again. He stiffened, fearful tremors rippling through his fur down to his very bones. This scent was fresh which meant the fox had to be nearby.

"Keep the apprentices protected," Wolfcall instructed. "I'll take the front. Hazelstripe, Pounceheart, flank Sunpaw, and Slowpaw and watch their tails."

The warriors did as they were told, making sure the apprentices would be safe if the predator showed itself. Sunpaw's heart pounded in fear and his eyes flashed wildly around him as they pressed

forward.

On the other paw, the Slowpaw waslooking rather annoyed. He pushed himself out of the circle of warriors andpositioned himself to walk behind Sunpaw. "I don't need my lousy mentor treatingme like a helpless kit." He sneered, but just as Hazelstripe could dart towardthe apprentice, the fox showed itself. And Sunpaw watched as it lunged straighttoward Slowpaw.

Chapter 9

Twitchpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Excitement tingled within her paw pads as she and Tigernose followed their clan deputy. She and Oddblaze had finished up their duties in the healer's den earlier than they had anticipated, and Twitchpaw was allowed to join the hunting patrol and stretch her legs. It was good hunting practice too and she enjoyed catching prey.

If only I could do this every day. She thought to herself. She liked being a healer apprentice and all, but spending each and every day in the den sorting herbs got boring after a while.

The river that separated FlameClan and CliffClan was full of lively swimming fish. Her mouth watered as she spotted them, their varied scales glittering in the brilliant sunlight that shone over the water's surface. She was so tempted to swipe at them and tear her claws at their soft bodies, but she had to be patient. Fish were difficult to catch. She had to make sure the fish wouldn't see her shadow and dart away.

She watched Pounceflight as she eyed a large trout swimming towards her way on the bank. She waited tolerantly; her paw poised to strike at the prey. Within a quick moment, the fish was in her claws and she dragged it to lay beside her before killing it with a swift bite.

Just when they were sure the fish was dead; she spotted a muscular gray and white tom on the opposite side of the river. His yellow-green eyes were narrowed and glittered with suspicion. He had a ball of moss clutched within his jaws where Twitchpaw could easily see his sharp, pointed teeth as the sunlight caught them.

But the tom didn't say a word as he dipped the moss in the river

and turned away to get back to his camp. Although she had never seen the clan camp herself, she knew it wasn't far from the river. It was sheltered and rarely any harm got to them. They would be vulnerable though if any clan were to plan an attack on them.

She shook her head. She was getting distracted. She wasn't there to waste time; she was there to hunt and obtain food for her clanmates. She was there to sharpen her hunting skills. Her amber eyes scanned the sparkling water as she searched for her own prey to target. She saw a few minnows here and there, but they were barely a mouthful each and were hardly worth trying to catch.

Then she found it. A long pinkish salmon near the bottom of the river. She mimicked what she had seen her clan's deputy do, waiting for it to get closer to her and raising her paw so she would be ready to strike at the fish.

But before she could attempt to claw at it, a patrol of CliffClan warriors approached the bank. She recognized the infamous clan leader at the front with Badgerclaw and the same gray and white tom she saw with the moss at her sides. The well-muscled warrior must have told his clanmates the FlameClan patrol was there. "What do you *LameClan mouse-brains* think you're doing?" Rainstar growled, her teeth barred.

"Er, hunting?" Pounceflight told her. "Is there a problem?"

"The river belongs to CliffClan!" Badgerclaw sneered. "So, step away from the bank and hand over the prey you fox-hearts stole!"

"Woah. The river belongs to both clans!" Thornflame interjected. "We can both hunt here, there are plenty of fish to catch."

Rainstar lashed her tail. "I'll ask you all one more time," she began, her voice seething with menace. The threatening look in her gaze made Twitchpaw shiver in fear as the leader took a step toward the river. "step away from the river and give us the prey."

Pounceflight met Rainstar's gaze defiantly. "No, it rightfully belongs to us." The golden-brown she-cat proclaimed. "Hunt here if you like, but we aren't leaving."

The reddish leader eyed the two warriors at her side. "Attack them! If it takes a battle to show them it's ours, then so be it!"

The FlameClan deputy looked toward Twitchpaw as the three cats leaped into the river without a second thought. "Go!" She yowled. "Tell Burningstar what happened. She'll send out more warriors!"

The apprentice nodded, immediately racing toward FlameClan's camp. She ignored the branches of overgrown bushes and the thorns that snagged at her fur like claws trying to rip her pelt off. She had to get to her clanmates! She had to get help!

She burst into camp panting, the other clan members giving her worried and surprised looks. "Burningstar!" She called, still trying to catch her breath. "CliffClan is attacking Pounceflight and Tigernose by the river! They need help, and quickly!"

Burningstar only nodded, searching the gathered clan cats for suitable fighters. "Thornflame! Runningfox! Come with me! We'll need all the warriors we can get for a clan as strong as CliffClan. Oddblaze, make sure everything in camp is fine while we're gone."

The she-cat pressed her muzzle to Oddblaze's shoulder and from where Twitchpaw was she could hear her mentor's murmurs. "Stay safe out there," his gentle voice was thick with worry as he spoke. "Watch over Tigernose too as much as you can."

Oddblaze's worry for his family was obvious as he watched the warriors leave. He retreated to the den to keep himself busy, something he did often to keep his mind off of his nerves. Twitchpaw sat outside, watching the warriors in camp as Oddblaze had asked of her.

He hoped her clanmates stayed safe. She hoped they would make it back to camp alive.

Chapter 10

Tiny

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Tiny lunged at her attacker, striking his flank with an outstretched paw. The light brown and gray tom dodged her attack though, rolling just out of her reach. The tom jumped to his paws, ramming into Tiny while she was distracted and pinned her to the grass.

"You mustn't let yourself get distracted," he told her, letting go of the hold he had on the young she-cat and nudging her to her paws once again. "In the heat of a battle, you have to stay focused!"

Tiny let out a sigh. She wondered if training to be a warrior was any worse than her training to be a member of the Clanless Clowder. Besides battle training, she also had to memorize every herb the clans used as well as hunting and how to keep the clans at peace, or what to do when they weren't.

Why was it her who had to learn it all? She thought back to the two siblings she left behind in her former clan. What if Mistpaw or Keenpaw were chosen instead? Surely, they would be a better fit for such a destiny than she was.

To make things worse, she was the youngest of all of the clowder's apprentices. Fox and Feather were almost done with their training and Badger were getting to that point. But everything she was being taught seemed to go way over her head. She always found her mind wandering when she was practicing battle moves with her mentor, and she always mixed up every herb or plant she was taught, no matter how much the older members tried to engrave it into her mind with imaginary claws.

The only thing she was good at was hunting, and even then, she only caught prey every once in a while. She looked into the bright blue sky, wondering if SpiritClan really thought she was fit to be in

the Clowder. What if Lynx had made a mistake?

"Any luck?" A white tom with pinkish-orange markings emerged from the undergrowth that surrounded the training area. He shook himself, sending the leaves and twigs that were caught in his long fur to the ground beneath him. It was Mumble, the clowder's oldest member after Grass.

"She's gotten a little better," Lynx began, though Tiny knew he was lying, "But at least the clowder has yet to engage in battle, so it isn't a priority at the moment."

The apprentice grew hot with shame, her ears drooping slightly. She would be useless to them. She wouldn't be surprised if Lynx refused to pass on his immortality to her once it came time.

"Good. Even a little progress is better than none." He gave Tiny a nod, his pale orange eyes glinting in approval. "Why don't you show me what you've got then?"

Tiny's heart began to race as the tom approached her. He was unusually small and thin, maybe he would be an easier opponent for her. She took a deep breath as Mumble waited for her to make the first move.

She lunged at him, hoping to knock him off balance, but the tom rolled out of the way before she could even reach him. She tumbled to the ground; the air knocked out of her. In almost an instant he had her pinned down and defeated. She underestimated the tom's size. He may be a small cat, but he was *fast,* especially considering his age.

"Keep practicing," Mumble told her, looking to Lynx as well who was off to the side, watching. "I'd try working on the way you charge into a fight. Most cats will be expecting their opponent to lunge at them, so it's easy for them to move out of the way and catch you off guard." He explained. "Don't fret. Mistakes are meant to be made during training. That's how you learn. You've only just started your training, so there's plenty of time for you to prepare yourself."

He was quick on his paws, but he was also very wise and clearly knew how to speak to a learning apprentice. *If only he was* my *mentor instead.* It wasn't that there was anything wrong with Lynx, he just seemed disinterested at times, as if he didn't want any part of the Clowder's apprentices at all. And usually, if she got a move wrong or forgot a property of an herb over and over again, he'd scold her and tell her how worthless she would be to the future of the four clans if she didn't get it right.

I shouldn't blame him though, she thought, remembering that Lynx was kind of an outcast compared to the other three members. *He was a last-minute replacement for the last member who betrayed them after all, I'd be mad too.*

She was so deep into her thoughts, she hadn't even realized Mumble had left, and Lynx was staring at her, his bright green eyes full of disappointment.

"Why can't you do anything right?" He hissed, his tail lashing behind him. "I bet your littermates would be much more successful."

My progress isn't helping his reputation at all. She didn't say a word, only blinked up at him with emotionless eyes as she always did when he got on to her.

"You can make up for it by hunting. Just catch *something,* to bring back to the others. I'll meet you in camp." And with that, the tom stalked off.

She let out a sigh. At least she was better at hunting than anything else she was taught. Lynx was right, about everything. How could he not be? He was an advisor for SpiritClan after all. Every Clowder member was once they received their immortality.

She left the training area, sniffing the air around her for any prey scent, but all she could smell was the grass, the leaves, the vegetation that surrounded her. She didn't smell anything, but as she sat there in silence with her nose up to the air, she definitely heard something.

It was a cry of distress, a yowl. The sound had come from another

cat, near where she was as she drank the air. She pricked her ears, following the sound. It wasn't prey, but she was going to be a member of the Clanless Clowder someday. It was her duty to help any cat in need. So that was what she would do.

Chapter 11

Petalwish

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

The wolf's narrowed, yellow eyes locked on her own green ones, wide in fear. She let out a yelp as the large creature lunged toward her, its jaws dripping with drool and it moved wildly as if it were about to trip over its own large paws.

She was able to dodge the dog-like creature with ease, but it didn't take long for the wolf to recover, shaking its large head and swinging it toward her before charging again. Petalwish wasn't so lucky this time. The monster caught her with long, sharp claws, tearing a large gaping wound on her shoulder that oozed with fresh blood. She let out a hiss of pain as the stinging of the scratch hit her.

She stumbled, spraying crimson over the nearby vegetation and plants. The wolf was going to kill her! But just as the gray monster looked toward her again, something sprang out of the bushes behind it, letting out a fearless yowl. It was another cat, a female with blue-gray fur. She looked about the age of an apprentice within bright yellow-orange eyes, though Petalwish could see a hint of fear in her determined gaze.

The small she-cat leaped at the wolf with unsheathed claws, but just as she grasped its long gray fur, the predator shook her off, sending her crashing into a nearby tree. The young newcomer collapsed, growing limp. Petalwish's only hope was lost.

Instinctively, she rushed towards the younger blue-gray she-cat. She could tell by the rise and fall of her pelt that she was alive, and although the healer couldn't see any surface wounds, she didn't know whether the she-cat was hurt internally. She grasped the cat's scruff in her jaws, setting her near an overgrown bush, hoping it would hide her for the time being. The wolf was following,

desperate to get to both cats.

Petalwish took off, crashing into the undergrowth and taking cover in some nearby vegetation. From where she was, she could just barely get a glimpse of the wolf between the plants that covered her. It was sniffing the air carefully and Petalwish feared it would find the both of them if its sense of smell was strong enough.

And maybe it *did* have a strong sense of smell, but Petalwish didn't find out. Loud howls erupted from far off in the distance, and from where the odd sound came from, Petalwish assumed it came from somewhere just outside CliffClan territory. The enemy bounded off as soon as the calls hit its ears, racing away as if it was never interested in the two, she-cats at all.

She waited for a few heartbeats before crawling out of the overgrown plants and retrieving the strange unconscious cat. She ran a paw over her pelt, making sure the young cat wasn't hurt. As far as she could tell, nothing was broken, but she was sure this cat would be sore for a few days.

She could take her all the way back to her clan's camp, but she wasn't sure how her clanmates would react and it would be such a hassle. *Perhaps instead I can bring her to the Clanless Clowder.* The cats of the group were all experienced healers, or at least that's what she was always told. Hopefully, they would care for this strange cat, or at least help her in doing so.

And so, she was off, making slow progress towards the den where the group of cats was located. The weight of the young she-cat was a lot, but fortunately bearable for Petalwish as long as she took small breaks every once in a while.

By the time she made it, the sun was beginning to set, casting colors across the sky with its dying light. She was approached by a brown tabby tom, his white-tipped tail twitching in worry as he spotted the she-cat hanging limply in her jaws.

"Petalwish," he greeted, "What are you doing so far from your clan, and with one of our *apprentices* for SpiritClan's sake?"

The healer shifted on her paws, embarrassed to find that she didn't really know the members' names. The only one she knew off the top of her head was Mumble's since it was a bit odd, and his coat color was unique, making him stand out among the others.

"I came to restock my herb supply," she explained, "but I ran into a wolf and your apprentice was trying to fight it off."

"Where's Lynx?" Mumble came out of his den and sent himself bounding toward her. "He should have stopped her." He looked at the brown tom with a questioning gaze, but the tom just shrugged.

"I haven't seen him since he took Tiny out to train." The brown tabby informed. "You don't think he's..." the older cat trailed off as he paused to think, "*wandering* again, do you?" Petalwish wasn't sure what the tabby meant by that, and his yellow-green eyes seemed to hide a deeper meaning to his words as he looked to Mumble.

The pinkish tom cleared his throat, leaving the question unanswered as he turned to Petalwish. "Thank you for saving Tiny and bringing her here. How can we repay you?"

"Oh, there's no need. If anything, she distracted the wolf and allowed me to escape with her." She told them both, assuring them they weren't in her debt. "If you want, I can stay and help you care for her." She offered, but Mumble shook his head.

"Thank you, but I'm sure your clan needs you much more. All of us know to heal, so she's in good paws." Petalwish nodded, but she could spot the hints of worry and doubt in his orange eyes.

SpiritClan won't dare take such an important cat's life, she thought to herself, *right?* She didn't know. Some young kits and apprentices had died in the past, but surely, they would keep a future Clowder member alive.

"Well, I'll be off then," she dipped her head to the two cats. "May SpiritClan guide your paws as you take care of Tiny."

The two toms thanked her as she left the flower-covered hills. The

sky was almost completely dark by the time she made it back to her own clan. She was shocked to find that many of her clanmates had fresh wounds showing on their pelts, but they didn't seem to mind. Their heads were held high as they strutted around camp and their eyes glinted in pride. What had happened while she was gone?

The first cat to approach her was Stoneshade, his amber gaze rounded in worry. "Petalwish, you must come quick!" He told her urgently. "It's Leafpounce! I'm afraid he isn't doing very well..."

Chapter 12

Keenpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Keenpaw watched from the far side of StreamClan camp as Mistpaw and her mentor emerged, their heads held high as they carried abundant amounts of prey. The she-cat dropped a large rabbit in the prey pile and her mentor followed with a plump squirrel as well as a mouse.

If only that fox-hearted wolf hadn't eaten my catch. He thought irritably, gathering the moss he had collected and distributing it to the warriors' den, where he set out clean bedding for his clanmates. He ducked out of the cave and stopped himself abruptly to avoid running into Quickpaw, who was waiting at the entrance.

"Quickpaw?" He dipped his head to greet her, flashing a questionable look at her. Perhaps she was trying to rub in how he came back to camp with empty paws while she and Mistpaw hunted like experienced warriors.

"Sorry, is this a bad time to talk?" For an older apprentice, she seemed embarrassed in front of Keenpaw, giving her chest fur self-conscious licks every once in a while.

"No. I just finished cleaning out bedding." He told her. "Why?"

"I was just wondering how hunting was going. If you want, I could give you some pointers." She suggested.

"Thanks, but no thanks," he told her, "I made my first catch today, but Shiningsoul and I had a run-in with a wolf that got to it."

"Oh, I'm sorry. If you ever want to, I know a way to sneak out of camp during the night. We could practice hunting together." The she-cat kept her voice low, making sure no cat in camp could hear

her conversation with Keenpaw.

The tom gave it a thought for a moment but shook his head. As much as he wanted to improve his hunting skill, he didn't like the idea of going against his clanmates' wishes, and if he ever got caught, who knew what kind of punishment would be sent his way?

Keenpaw padded off toward the prey pile, looking back to see the sandy brown and white she-cat's saddened yellow gaze as it followed him. *Sorry, Quickpaw. I don't want to take any chances.*

Thanks to the large prey pile that had collected, every cat was full by the time they had all eaten and Keenpaw felt like he drifted off to sleep as soon as he crawled into his nest.

The next thing he knew, he was awake, blinking away the sleep in his eyes and getting to his paws. The sky above him was bright, stinging his eyes as he looked up into the endless sea of blue that hung above him.

But wait, the sky was above him. He wasn't in the apprentices' den at all. His heart began to pound in fear as he looked around. Towering above him were large oak and birch trees that seemed to stretch infinitely into the sky. Panic rose in his chest once he remembered what territory looked like the one, he was in.

BreezeClan! It has to be! But how did I get here? Had he walked in his sleep? As strange as it sounded, he knew it was possible, but he never recalled doing so before.

Pawsteps sounded from behind him and he spun around, trying to come up with some sort of reasonable excuse as to why he was intruding. But the thoughts in his mind were so wild, he couldn't come up with anything. The cat he met wasn't like any normal cat he had ever seen though. Its fur was slightly transparent and he could see the rest of the landscape before him through its pelt.

"Fear not, Keenpaw. You're dreaming." It wasn't until the stranger spoke when Keenpaw realized he was shivering slightly in fear. The

apprentice could tell this cat was male by the tone of his voice and he relaxed. He was only dreaming, there was nothing to be afraid of. *Right?*

Keenpaw narrowed his eyes, squinting his blue-green eyes to get a glimpse of the tom's appearance despite the transparent look of his coat. He was definitely handsome, with golden fur like a ray of sunlight shining down from the sky. He was well-muscled too, definitely a strong warrior if he had to make a guess.

"Even long after my leadership, BreezeClan territory still looks the same." The golden tom said out loud as he took in his surroundings. Keenpaw's eyes grew wide in realization. *Is it really...* him? He had never actually seen the cat before that encounter.

"No way..." he breathed, "you're *Breezestar*?" He asked in astonishment.

The leader smiled. "I knew you were intelligent from the moment I laid my eyes on you."

Keenpaw's heart soared with pride at his words. "You really think so?" He inquired. Ever since he was apprenticed, he felt as though he wasn't good enough.

"Of course, I know that for a fact." He said, his eyes shining as he looked toward Keenpaw. "Why else would I choose to bring such an important message to you?" He let out a slight chuckle before his gaze darkened, and his voice lowered, his tone becoming more serious. "I'm afraid I'm running out of time, young Keenpaw, but you must know this," the tom paused, glancing at his fading form before turning his green eyes back to the apprentice before him. "Beware the clouds that cover the sky, Keenpaw."

And with that, the golden warrior disappeared from the silver-furred apprentice's sight, and before he knew it, the landscape before him began to disappear too. Darkness pooled his vision and in what seemed like an instant, he opened his eyes, awake in his own den.

He was back to his own clan. He was back to his responsibilities.

Chapter 13

Sunpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Sunpaw thought if Slowpaw were to die, he'd be fine. If it ever happened, he wouldn't have to deal with the obnoxious younger apprentice getting on his nerves. But once the fox got to him, Sunpaw found it hard to watch it attack his clanmate.

Hazelstripe was the first cat to charge at the predator, sinking his claws into the creature's gray fur, but it kept a tight grip on Slowpaw's scruff. It easily shook the warrior off, but Pounceheart was there to take his place, swiping at the fox's long snout with his outstretched claws.

But it dodged the warrior's attack, shaking the light brown apprentice in its jaws as if he were prey. Wolfcall joined the fight alongside Pounceheart, snapping at its flank with her strong jaws. With an irritated growl, the fox threw Slowpaw to the ground, and Sunpaw watched as the apprentice went limp.

Hazelstripe joined his clanmates once again and together the three warriors were able to overtake the fox and easily pin it to the ground beneath their paws. Wolfcall was the one to make the final blow, sinking her teeth into its thick-furred neck.

Sunpaw didn't do much more than twitch his tail during the entire fight. He stood there frozen in fear as if his paws were stuck to the ground until the fox was dead. It was just a lifeless heap of gray fur now, the oozing blood on its neck turning it crimson.

Not one of the warriors seemed to even notice him though as they all circled Slowpaw. "He's still alive, but we must bring him to Swallowflower and Cloudysky to keep him that way!" Wolfcall mewed, grasping the apprentice's scruff in her jaws. Hazelstripe followed the deputy as she made her way back to camp, her eyes

narrowed and determined despite Slowpaw's weight.

Only Pounceheart waited up for Sunpaw, stroking his apprentice comfortingly with his white-tipped tail. None of them spoke until they reached BreezeClan's camp and Sunpaw found the awkward silence unsettling.

There were times when Sunpaw wished his mentor would just shut up, but at that very moment, he wished he could listen to Pounceheart's soothing and calm voice. He wanted to hear his words of encouragement, of assurance that everything would be okay. But the gray and white warrior seemed stunned to silence, his gaze on his trudging paws, and his ears drooping.

Finchfrost was at the camp entrance once they arrived, dipping their head to greet them, although his green gaze glistened with worry. "What happened out there?" They asked. "Is Slowpaw alright?"

All the cheerfulness that Pounceheart's voice once had seemed to vanish as he answered the messenger. "We ran into a fox," he sighed. "I'm really not sure about Slowpaw..." As the warrior's voice trailed off, he padded away, leaving Sunpaw.

Finchfrost turned to the apprentice. "I don't think Pounceheart will be up to training you any longer today, but you can always join me and Fleetpaw." The warrior offered. "We'll be heading out to hunt soon."

"Yeah, I can join," he said with a nod. It would be a good way to keep his mind off of what had happened during his last patrol.

Sunpaw padded into camp to wait for Finchfrost to finish up their guard duty and found himself about to run into Fleetpaw. Her eyes were closed and her light brown tabby head was pointed toward her paws. Her cream-colored tail was wrapped neatly around her paws and she didn't seem to hear him approach her.

He caught himself just before bumping into her and sending her out of the odd trance she seemed to be in. Their pelts were almost touching and he could smell her sweet scent as he processed what

was happening. He backed away, silently wondering whether he should get her attention or not.

But before he made up his mind, the female apprentice's eyelids lifted, revealing her round dark green eyes. Sunpaw's heart pounded as their eyes met and he struggled to compose himself.

"Sunpaw? What is it? Do you need something?" She asked, surprise glistening in her flustered gaze.

"I-I- No. No, I don't need anything." He told her. Nervousness pricked at his pelt and sent shivers through his fur. "I was just... wondering what you were doing." He admitted, licking his chest a few times in embarrassment.

"Oh, so the training of a messenger has piqued your interest I see." She said with a flick of her tail, looking pleased that some cat actually cared about what she did as Finchfrost's apprentice. "They're just breathing exercises." She informed him, "Finchfrost says they're necessary for any messenger, even though they don't help me in any way as far as I can tell." She rolled her eyes. "Wanna try?" She asked, "I could probably teach you some."

But just as he opened his jaws to give her an answer, her mentor approached them, beckoning them with a few flicks of their tail. Fleetpaw eyed the other apprentice, as if wanting to ask why he was coming with them as they went out to hunt, but she didn't say anything.

They made their way towards the StreamClan border. The grass beneath his paws was a little mushy and his paws sunk just a little every time he made a step. The beginning of the marshes was his least favorite part of BreezeClan's territory. He wasn't very used to the forest floor trying to swallow him up at any chance it had even though he had hunted there countless times before.

How does StreamClan hunt prey in such land? He wondered. But then again, they willingly got their fur wet and primarily ate slimy fish. *What an odd clan.*

Sunpaw kept his ears pricked, his nose high in the air as he tried to

catch any prey scents that lingered there. Both Finchfrost and Fleetpaw had gone in different directions to search for suitable food, so Sunpaw was alone. He thought back to the earlier border patrol, the memories of the fox attacking Slowpaw resurfacing in his mind. He shut his eyes tightly, wincing at the image. He shook his head, trying to shake the memories away and keep his focus on the task ahead of him.

Once he had regained his concentration on trying to track prey, the scent of a vole hit his nose and he caught sight of it gnawing on something it had found. Sunpaw lowered himself, positioning his body into a crouch, ensuring the prey wouldn't sense him. Once he was confident, he could catch the creature, he lunged, his claws outstretched catching the small animal. It let out a screech of surprise but it was quickly cut off by Sunpaw's swift, fatal bite.

He let out a low growl of pride, snatching the prey in his jaws. But as he began making his way towards Finchfrost, he heard pounding pawsteps come from behind him. He spun around, expecting a fox or some other predator to lunge at him, but instead found Fleetpaw at the heels of a large rabbit. His clanmate was chasing it towards him! He couldn't let the apprentice down.

The rabbit veered away, but Sunpaw was fast enough to pin it to the ground, tossing his vole to the side. It struggled against his grip, but he wasn't going to let go. He nodded toward Fleetpaw.

"You should be the one to make the kill." He told her and she smiled, giving him a thankful glare before bending her head toward the struggling animal, snapping its neck in a matter of seconds.

"We make a great team, don't we?" Fleetpaw said to him, giving him a nudge.

"Thanks, but I'm sure you would have caught it even without my interference." He told her. "You're a messenger apprentice after all!"

"Well, done! Both of you!" Finchfrost emerged from the undergrowth with two large, fat mice dangling in their jaws. "We should get back to camp. I'm sure Pounceheart would be proud to see how successful your hunt has been." They told Sunpaw.

The apprentice dreaded every step he took as they headed back to camp. He was worried about how Slowpaw was doing. He didn't like the apprentice, but if he died, it would be Sunpaw's fault.

Chapter 14

Twitchpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

She waited patiently for her clanmates to return, worrying for their safety. Burningstar had taken all of the warriors to the river to fight off CliffClan for the river, leaving the camp almost empty. The silence was unsettling as she kept watch over the cats left while Oddblaze busied himself sorting herbs and preparing for what injuries any warriors would have once they returned.

Smokeflight was at the entrance standing guard. No cat knew if the twoleg village near them would ever investigate their camp or intrude. And even if they didn't, other predators could potentially attack them while the warriors were gone.

The two elders, Branchberry and Skystreak were lazily basking in the dying sunlight while Reedpaw cleaned out the bedding in their den. Twitchpaw was facing the sunset, staring in awe at the brilliant colors that filled the darkening sky. It was getting late. *Burningstar has to be back* soon, *right?*

Only SpiritClan knew. Rainstar was ruthless and would stop at nothing to get what she wanted. Burningstar was also determined, but the FlameClan leader knew when her clanmates had suffered enough.

Is such a battle even worth fighting over a river? She thought to herself. But even she knew that the clan relied heavily on the stream for food. With the twoleg village taking up a large portion of their territory, the prey was almost impossible to find anywhere else. If they lost the river, the entire clan would be at risk of starvation.

Reedpaw must have finished his duties as she was thinking to herself because she felt his tail brush against her back, and she

turned to greet him.

"I hope they're all okay," he said softly, referring to the absent clan members. "Rainstar and her warriors will stop at nothing to get what they want."

"Me too. I don't understand why things suddenly changed." She replied. "Rainstar was fine with sharing the river until now, and I'm sure CliffClan has plenty of prey running."

Reedpaw shrugged. "That's CliffClan for you I guess."

That was where their conversation ended, as Smokeflight scurried into camp with Burningstar and her other clanmates trailing after him. She noticed a limping Thornflame, a blood-spattered Pounceflight, and Tigernose with a torn ear helping a badly wounded Runningfox.

Twitchpaw rushed to help them and Oddblaze must've noticed their return as well because he was at her heels in an instant. Out of them all, Runningfox and Pounceflight seemed to have suffered the worst from the battle.

"Well?" Asked Skystreak, "Do we still have the river?"

Burningstar's only reply was a shake of her head, and shock glistened in Twitchpaw's eyes. Without the river, how were they going to survive without starving? But the apprentice didn't have time to think about such things. Her priority was helping her clanmates with Oddblaze. She helped Runningfox make his way into the den, his blood sticking to her fur. Once he was lying in a nest within the healer's den, Twitchpaw began to wash his wounds with her tongue. She was trying her best to be gentle, but she could tell her clanmate was in obvious discomfort. *I'm sorry, but if I don't wash your pelt, I won't be able to clearly see your wounds.* She thought, hoping the tom could forgive her once he had been treated.

Once she had cleaned him, she could identify a large gaping gash in his leg and a deep cut in his neck. There were a few more scratches and cuts along his body, but they weren't very severe compared to the others. She gathered some cobwebs and covered his oozing

injuries as much as she could, but blood-drenched them almost immediately and their stash of cobwebs was getting very low as each cat was treated. She'd have to go fetch some more.

She got Oddblaze's approval and set out, hoping she could find some before the sunset completely. Luckily, she found a good amount not far from camp and hurried back to camp. Runningfox was asleep now and Twitchpaw assumed Oddblaze had given him poppy seeds while she was gone. Other than him, the only cat left was Pounceflight, but her wounds didn't look as serious as the toms. She quickly pressed the cobwebs she collected into her patient's wounds. The bleeding wasn't as bad anymore, but it hadn't stopped completely, and it was already soaking his pelt.

She gave the sleeping tom one last clean of his fur and stepped back, knowing she had done everything she could for now.

"Great work, Twitchpaw. I think you might be ready for your ceremony soon." Oddblaze told her, pride clearly glistening in his green gaze.

"You really think I'm ready?" She asked, doubt pricking at her fur. She wasn't sure she could take the responsibility of a full healer quite yet.

"Of course. You've proven you're ready with how you handled Runningfox's situation." He purred, giving her a comforting lick on her sand-colored and white shoulder. "You'll make a great healer; I know that for certain."

"Thank you," she replied, the skin beneath her fur growing warm with embarrassment.

"Of course," he paused, nodding to her empty nest, "Now you should get some rest." He spoke. "You've had a long day."

She gave him an appreciative glance before curling up into her nest of moss and bracken. Almost as soon as she closed her eyes, she fell asleep. She blinked open her eyes in what seemed like moments later and found herself on the bank of the river. Cats of all different pelt colors were fighting, their teeth bared into snarls and their

claws unsheathed. She recognized the infamous Rainstar among them, ordering her warriors to attack as well as many of her clanmates launching themselves into battle. She tried to help her clanmates, but her paws went through the pelts of the CliffClan warriors. All she could do was watch as the battle played out.

She watched as a familiar, muscular white tom shoved his opponent into the river. Twitchpaw watched in horror as the cream-colored blur stumbled and fell with a splash. Suddenly, the once-calm stream seemed to thrash wildly, waves rippling across the surface and slamming forcefully onto the sandy bank. *Who was it? Thornflame?* She wasn't sure exactly; she never saw exactly who the cat was. Moments later, the river calmed down, but the cat never resurfaced. Her clanmate was gone. And that was when her vision went dark.

Chapter 15

Tiny

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Tiny felt as if a badger had attempted to bite off every one of her limbs. Her entire body was sore and her muscles protested against every movement she made, no matter how slight. She found herself curled up in a cozy nest, but it wasn't her own. She blinked around to get a good look at her surroundings and was relieved to find that they were familiar to her.

She was in the large cave that belonged to the members of the Clanless Clowder. It was large, and much more appealing than the compact, makeshift den she and the other apprentices slept in. It was a small cave that Tiny felt could collapse at any moment, despite how much Lynx and the other mentors would assure her that it wouldn't.

The den was empty, and the sunlight shone brightly through the den entrance. How much time had passed since the wolf had attacked her? And what happened to the she-cat she was trying to save? Many more questions muddled her mind, leaving her wondering, but at least it kept her busy while she lay there.

It didn't keep her occupied long enough, apparently. She got bored and finally decided it wouldn't hurt to try and move around a little bit. She was wrong. It hurt a lot. But she was able to get to her paws just as Grass walked into the den.

"Tiny! You're awake!" He mewed, his yellow-green eyes shining. He licked her head gently before questioning, "How do you feel?"

"Sore." She answered with a sigh. "What happened? Was any cat able to take down that wolf?"

But the brown tabby shook his head. "No. According to Petalwish it

ran off." He answered her. "Every cat's worried about you. Can you walk?"

Tiny nodded, although she was unsure as she hadn't tried just yet. She winced as she took the first few steps, but the pain subsided as she continued. Her muscles and limbs ached, but at least that had been the worst of her injuries. *Petalwish,* she thought, confused. *Was that the cat I ran into?* She didn't recognize the name, but then again, there were so many cats in each clan, she felt that it was nearly impossible to keep track of them all.

Almost immediately as she walked out, she spotted Mumble near the small prey pile who dipped his head to greet her. His pale orange eyes brightened with relief once he saw her and Grass exit the cave.

"Still no sign of Lynx?" Grass inquired, looking towards the fluffy, pinkish tom.

Mumble let out a sigh before answering. "It isn't like him to be gone this long. Do you think he's alright?"

Tiny couldn't help cutting in. "Wait what? He's missing? How long has he been gone?" Panic began to rise in her chest and her heart thundered within her ribcage.

"Since yesterday, sometime before Petalwish arrived with you unconscious, I'd assume." Mumble answered her. That was when Tiny began to recall what had happened before the wolf attack.

"He told me he'd wait for me in camp until a caught some prey to bring back." She told the two mentors. "He never returned at all? Are you sure?"

The two toms exchanged a glance that Tiny couldn't read, while her mind ran wild with questions. *What if the wolf got to Lynx before me and Petalwish found it?* The young she-cat tried to shake the thought away. She had to be optimistic, surely, he was wandering the flower forest somewhere. Tiny hoped it was true, but she couldn't be certain just yet.

"We've patrolled and searched the hills as much as possible, but we haven't found any sign of him." All three cats turned to see Frost padding toward them, with her brother, Wolf following just behind her. Their apprentices were right beside them, but Wolf motioned for them to get to their dens. Badger obeyed with a sigh of relief, while Fox rolled her eyes, clearly annoyed and irritated as she always seemed to be. But she looked back at Tiny just before ducking into the entrance of the apprentice's cave, relief and contentedness flooding her eyes and she flashed a smile at the blue-gray apprentice before disappearing into the den.

She hadn't really known the cats of the clowder for very long, but so far, she really liked Fox. She was kind as long as you were kind to her as well, but she also wasn't afraid to stand up for herself when it was necessary. The reddish tabby would definitely make a great member of the clowder once it came time.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he went back to the soft kittypet life." Wolf growled, not even trying to hide the aggravation in his amber gaze. "I knew it would only be a matter of time before that happened." *Kittypet life?* She hadn't known her mentor had once been a kittypet. But as she thought about it more, it made sense. The odd collar he wore around his neck, and his strange disappearances when he was out hunting or training with Tiny should've been an obvious sign to her.

"But we don't know that for sure," Frost replied, but even she looked unsure, and she kept shifting on her paws as if she were uncomfortable. "right?"

No cat answered her, and silence settled among all five cats. Even Tiny didn't know what to believe. It seemed very likely that Lynx would go back to his old life, but she couldn't find herself accepting the fact he would do such a thing. *How could he just betray us like that when he has such an important destiny in the clans? Unless he wanted to keep his immortality for himself and refuses to come back and pass it on to me.*

It wasn't a bad theory, but she didn't want to blurt it out to the mentors. What if they decided to kick her out of the clowder because they thought she would be worthless to them after all?

"We've done enough searching." Wolf declared, finally breaking the silence. "I'm not going to waste more time looking for that mouse-brain. He made his choice." And with that, the gray and white tom stalked away, leaving Wolf, Grass, and Mumble to make up their minds.

"I'm afraid I have to agree with my brother." Frost meowed. "We've been at this since yesterday upon Tiny's return with no luck and I don't want to repeat the same thing all over again at the twoleg place."

But what about my immortality? She wanted to ask. *What about the future of the clans?* But she kept her jaws shut and swallowed back a cry of distress. The dull ache in her head only seemed to get worse as panicked thoughts swarmed her mind.

"He'll turn up eventually," Grass assured, but Tiny could see past the confident glint in his eyes. Much deeper within his brilliant yellow-green gaze, there was doubt that was impossible for him to hide completely.

I sure hope he's right. Tiny thought, but even she knew the chance of Lynx returning was very slim.

Chapter 16

Petalwish

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

She was shocked to see Junipernose in the Healer's den once she entered. His brown paws shifted anxiously and he looked exhausted. He let out a relieved sigh once he saw her. "Petalwish! Where have you been?"

"I'm sorry, Junipernose." She felt terrible, knowing that her mentor was sure to be angry with her deep within all of his other emotions. "I went out to get herbs and something happened." She figured there really wasn't a point in explaining right then and there. Her green eyes shifted to the far backside of the den, where Leafpounce lay asleep in his temporary nest. Or at least she hoped it would be temporary. "What are you doing in here? Shouldn't you be in the elder's den-like Brackenpounce?"

"Leafpounce needs me more than Brackenpounce does. She'll be fine on her own for the time being." He told her.

"But you've retired. I can take over from here..." She insisted, but the creamy brown tom shook his head, his focus returning to the sleeping golden tabby. "How's he doing? Stoneshade informed me things weren't going well."

"He's... okay," Junipernose answered. "I don't think it's something any herbs can fix though. He'll have to pull through this on his own."

If he can. She thought to herself. She let out a sigh, staring at the golden tabby tom for a long moment, remembering all of the time they had spent together as apprentices. Even though she was younger than Leafpounce, she always felt bad for the tom. He was an incredible warrior, especially when it came to his hunting skills, but the tom was looked down on by the other CliffClan cats for his

heritage.

She had been told that he was only a kit when he had been found, abandoned, and left to die in the cold. Many cats thought they shouldn't take him in because of his oddly-shaped paws. Instead of the usual five toes a cat normally had, Leafpounce had eight toes on both of his forepaws, which was rumored to be bad luck according to legend.

But Rainstar wasn't going to throw away another potential warrior for her clan, and she especially didn't want to go against the Warrior Code. So, he was taken in as a member of CliffClan, but Petalwish still caught the scornful glances that were cast at him by other warriors every once in a while.

She liked his odd paws though. That was what made him unique after all, at least in appearance. His personality was great too. He was loyal to his clan, but he also shared the same cheerful and joking temperament as his former mentor, Stoneshade.

Petalwish strode out of the den to check over her clanmates, remembering the sight of wounds she had seen on some of them. The first cat she saw was Strikestorm, who had a large cut on one of his back legs, clumps of dried blood covering the gray fur around it. He was lounging lazily just outside the warriors' den, catching the last of the sun's dying rays before it disappeared completely over the horizon.

"Strikestorm." She greeted, with a polite dip of her dark orange head, but the muscular warrior just glared at her, his cold yellow-green eyes narrowed into slits as she padded closer.

"What do you want?" His voice came out in a low, sneering growl as he spoke.

"As your healer, it is my duty to check over your wounds," she replied, nodding toward his leg and flicking one of her ears at him. "such as the cut on your leg."

"Hmph," To her surprise, she stretched out his injured leg, still casting her suspicious glances every once in a while. "What were

you doing out of camp all day? Conspiring with another clan perhaps?"

Petalwish looked taken aback, her eyes wide in surprise. "What?" *Was that what every cat thinks I've been doing all this time?* "N-No." She stammered, trying to assure the tom that she was loyal to her clan, but she only seemed to be making herself look worse. How was she supposed to explain what she had been spending the day doing? How would every cat react to her run-in with the wolf, followed by her interaction with the Clanless Clowder? "I-It's a long story..." Her voice trailed off, and with a helpless sigh, she realized how awkward their conversation was getting and how suspicious she seemed to Strikestorm.

As if the thought of the prior events were a reminder, the gaping wound in her shoulder began to throb once again, and she could feel a slight trickle of blood beginning to spill out onto her orange fur. But she didn't let it distract her. Instead, she continued cleaning Strikestorm's own wound.

Once she had applied a poultice on the cut, she broke away from the gray and white tom and headed for the leader's den. The reddish-brown she-cat had dozed off in her mossy nest, looking peaceful as she slept. Petalwish was about to wake her but hesitated. Whatever had gone on while she was absent, it seemed like it had drained every cat's energy. She turned and padded away, leaving her mother to rest. She wanted to know what exactly had gone on in the clan, but she could wait until tomorrow when Rainstar was awake.

Finally, she curled into her own nest in her den. Junipernose had gone to the elder's den for the night and it was so quiet that Leafpounce's shallow breaths eventually lulled her into a dreamless sleep.

Chapter 17

Keenpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Ever since his ominous dream, he felt so vulnerable, as if at any moment, the sky would darken and something would come to harm his clan. The words of Breezestar kept echoing in his mind, and it felt impossible to focus on anything.

Beware the clouds that cover the sky, Keenpaw. He found himself glancing up at the sky at every moment, watching for any sign of clouds obscuring the sky above him, but nothing was there. The sky was bright blue and clear. There wasn't a cloud in sight.

The sun beat down on him as he and Mistpaw practiced their combat skills in the soft muddy patch that marked their battle training grounds. Off to the side, their mentors Heronclaw and Shiningsoul stood, watching them through narrowed eyes.

Mistpaw struck out at him first, landing a powerful blow at him with one of her white forepaws. He stumbled for a moment before shaking himself and lunging at his opponent. He slammed into her, knocking the she-cat to the ground and sending the both of them tumbling. He felt thick, sticky, mud splash against his pelt, clinging to every one of his silver furs. But by now, he had participated in enough battle training sessions that he was used to it.

Keenpaw felt his paws slip as he tried to pin his sister down and Mistpaw was able to retaliate with astonishing speed, throwing him off of her. He stumbled, skidding on the wet mud beneath him and eventually falling. Mistpaw took the opportunity to pin him down, placing a paw on his neck as if to let him know she was a capable warrior.

"Nicely done, Mistpaw!" Her mentor praised, padding toward them with pride shining in her blue eyes. "I just know you'll be a great

warrior of StreamClan one day. Maybe you'll even reach the position of a leader."

"You really think *I* could be a leader?" Mistpaw questioned, her shining eyes wide. Heronclaw nodded in reply.

"You'd be an excellent candidate." Shiningsoul agreed. "If you think you could take the responsibility, you could work toward such a goal." He looked to his own apprentice. "You as well, Keenpaw. You both will make excellent warriors for our clan."

Keenpaw tried to imagine himself as a leader. Perhaps he would make the Clanless Clowder let Tiny back into StreamClan. Or maybe he could convince the other clans that the Clowder isn't even needed at all.

The whole group sounded mouse-brained to him. How come each clan couldn't have their own cat to speak to SpiritClan and mediate the clans? Then they could take on an apprentice as usual. There was no point in splitting them up from all of the clans.

Even if he didn't become a leader of his clan one day, he was still determined to get his sister back. Who cared that she was a part of some destiny? She should have the chance to forge her own path, to determine her own fate. *Prophecies are mouse-brained anyways.* He thought to himself, and the odd message resurfaced in his mind once again.

Beware the clouds that cover the sky. But he shoved it in the back of his brain. Hopefully the sky would stay bright and sunny and he wouldn't have to worry about some unknown and dangerous threat.

Keenpaw shook himself, glancing subconsciously at the sky. Still the same shade of vibrant blue, as it had been since the sun had risen.

The tom let out a sigh and tried to refocus his mind, letting his gaze rest on Mistpaw. He readied himself to spring at her again, feeling the muscles in his legs surge as he prepared to pounce. The she-cat did the same, but rather than positioning herself to attack Keenpaw, she seemed to be analyzing his stance with her yellow eyes as if trying to predict what the tom was going to do.

He lunged in a swift motion, but she had been expecting him to make such a move and she easily dodged his flailing paws. Keenpaw clawed at empty air before he was sent tumbling into the mud. The splash sent thick, brown sludge toward Mistpaw, distracting the she-cat momentarily as it clung to her gray and white fur.

She shook herself, giving Keenpaw the chance to spring at her again. The tom barreled into the she-cat while she was distracted with her muddied pelt and knocked her down. He was able to pin her for just a moment before his paws slipped and Mistpaw rolled away from her attacker.

Mistpaw let out an irritated hiss. "Why don't we ever practice somewhere dryer? I *hate* having to clean my pelt after training. It takes *forever* to get all of this mud out." She rolled her eyes.

Keenpaw took that opportunity to lunge at her again, getting a better grip on her this time and succeeding to pin her down.

"Nicely done, Keenpaw." His mentor purred from beside the muddy training area.

"Thank you." The apprentice replied with a grateful nod before releasing his hold on Mistpaw.

"I think it's about time we wrap up this training session." Heronclaw meowed, with a glance at Shiningsoul who nodded his agreement.

As the two mentors strode ahead, Keenpaw found Mistpaw trailing behind a few pawsteps and slowed to fall in step with her.

"You let me do that, didn't you?" He asked her, referring to the previous session when she had been distracted.

"How'd you know?" She asked, swiping at his ear with a paw, but Keenpaw dodged, ducking his head. Amusement glittered in her eyes. "Oh, come on, I let you defeat me, can I at least swipe your ear?" She let out a laugh. "You deserve it after all, mouse-brain." Her throat vibrated as she purred.

"You're too slow." He replied. They both walked in silence for a few

moments until finally, Keenpaw gathered enough courage to say, "Thanks for letting me win that. I've been a bit distracted with training lately." He admitted.

"Is it about Tiny again?" She asked. "I know you miss her, Keenpaw, but you should also be proud of her. She's set to accomplish so much in the clans. So many cats will rely on her once she becomes a full member of the Clanless Clowder."

Keenpaw found himself glancing at the sky again, just for a moment, before returning his focus to his sister. He nodded, knowing very well it wasn't the entire truth. But he didn't want to worry her with the ominous message he had received.

"I'm just worried about her. What if the destiny planned for her isn't what she wants? What if she wants to become a warrior like us?" He asked.

"Keenpaw..." Her voice trailed off for just a heartbeat before she sighed and picked up her sentence. "You and I both know she can't become a warrior. SpiritClan chose her for a reason. She must be the most capable young cat out of everyone else." As they neared the camp entrance, Mistpaw reminded him in a soft tone of voice, "Be proud of her. That's all we can do right now."

And Keenpaw, although he didn't want to accept it, knew it was true. He was just an apprentice. All he could do for his sister was feel proud of her and encourage her, even if she couldn't see them doing so.

Chapter 18

Sunpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Sunpaw basked in a patch of grass, warmed by the bright sun. His eyes flitted lazily across the camp as his mind wandered, lost in a thick forest of thoughts.

It had now been days since Slowpaw's accident and his mentor, Pounceheart still didn't seem very interested in getting back to training his apprentice just yet.

Poor Pounceheart. Sunpaw let out a sigh. *It isn't his fault Slowpaw got hurt. If anything, it's mine...* Sunpaw had felt weighed down by guilt ever since the incident had occurred. Why hadn't he done anything? Why had he stood around to watch it all happen? Perhaps if he had at least tried to help the apprentice, Slowpaw never would have gotten hurt.

His thoughts were interrupted quite abruptly when Littlelight, BreezeClan's only current queen strode up to him, flicking her tail to and fro to get his attention. "Sunpaw," her tone carried a hint of worry, but the apprentice could tell she was trying to hide it. "Have you seen Fiercekit or Cleverkit by any chance?" She questioned. But Sunpaw shook his head.

"Why?" He asked. "Are they not in the nursery?" Worry began to prick at his pelt at the thought. As he gazed out to peer at the cave entrance that led to the nursery only to see a very concerned-looking Thunderkit.

The queen shook her head. "No. I left them with Fleetpaw but her mentor must have taken her out of camp and I guess she forgot to let any cat know." She spoke. "They must have snuck out of camp while no cat was watching them."

Panic began to rise in Sunpaw's chest. "We have to find them!" He sputtered suddenly. His eyes flew wildly around him before he fixed them on Littlelight. "Should I tell Lightningstar?" He asked, flustered and not sure what to do.

"Yes. Go tell him! I'll find some other cat to take care of Thunderkit." She replied. "They're my kits, so it is only right that I help search for them."

The apprentice raced to his leader's den, feeling grass tear beneath his claws as he ran. "Lightningstar!" He called, rushing into the tom's cave. He knew it was disrespectful to enter his leader's den without being invited first, but he didn't care. This was urgent. Lightningstar would understand his reasons. He hoped that was true at least.

"Sunpaw?" The old leader spun around, blinking at him in confusion.

From a distance, the apprentice had never noticed, but up close to Lightningstar as he was at that moment, he could clearly see the leader's light gray muzzle he had developed due to his age. It was at that moment when he realized that there would be a time in Sunpaw's life when Lightningstar would no longer be BreezeClan's leader. But he shoved the thought to the back of his mind. He had to focus on the problem they were dealing with now.

"It's Littlelight's kits! Cleverkit and Fiercekit have gone missing!" His desperate mew rang and echoed across the stone walls around him as Lightningstar's pale yellow eyes went wide in alarm.

The leader stood up and began to pace slowly across the small den, muttering to himself, although Sunpaw could clearly hear him. "Wolfcall's patrol is hunting right now, but the best chance of finding those kits would mean sending out the majority of BreezeClan to search for them." After a moment of thought, he finally spoke once again. "Sunpaw," his mew was stern as the apprentice glanced up at Lightningstar, their gazes locking for just a moment. "Go find that patrol and tell them to look for those kits!"

Sunpaw nodded vigorously before spinning around and practically

leaping out of the den. He almost tripped over his own paws in the process, but he managed to keep his balance as he scrambled desperately to the camp entrance.

Don't worry kits! We'll find you! He thought through the worst possible scenarios were cycling through his mind, swirling around him like snowflakes in an endless blizzard. Once he made it outside the clan camp, he tasted the air, hoping he could taste the lingering scent of Wolfcall's hunting patrol, but he found it impossible. Too many cats came in and out of BreezeClan's camp, obscuring specific scents such as the one he was searching for.

He hoped they would be deep in the forest, a popular hunting area within BreezeClan territory since the prey was so plentiful there. He ran as fast as his paws could take him. His lungs ached as he weaved through the trees and he wished he could have participated in some of the running exercises Fleetpaw had with Finchfrost.

He didn't even know how long he had been running once he heard voices in the distance calling out. "Great teamwork Fleetpaw!" He instantly recognized Finchfrost's gentle voice. He followed the yowl to a copse of trees and caught sight of the black messenger soon later.

Fleetpaw was running toward them with a large cream-colored and white rabbit hanging from her jaws. The apprentice must have seen Sunpaw's orange fur sticking out amongst the natural colors of the undergrowth around them because her ears pricked up in interest and she let out a mew of surprise.

"Sunpaw what are you doing out here?" She inquired once she had dropped the rabbit at her mentor's paws. The black-furred cat followed Fleetpaw's gaze.

"Have you seen Fiercekit or Cleverkit around?" He asked.

Both of them shook their heads, and within a heartbeat, Fleetpaw's eyes went so wide Sunpaw was worried they would pop out of her head. "Oh no! I didn't have any cat watch over them before I left. Did they sneak out? What if- "

Finchfrost draped their tail across their apprentice's shoulders, cutting her off.

"I'm sure they're fine." They told her in a calm tone of voice. "We'll catch find in no time, don't worry."

"I'll search the StreamClan border!" Sunpaw called, as he made his way past his clanmates. "Tell the rest of the patrol to help search for them as well!" And with that, he disappeared into the vegetation. As he left, he could still hear the muffled conversations of the patrol members, though he couldn't make out what they were saying.

He hoped what Finchfrost said was true. He hoped the kits *were* fine and that they *would* be found soon. He never knew he'd feel so happy to feel the edges of the moist marshland that marked the edges of BreezeClan's land, where their grassy forest gave way to the wetlands of StreamClan. He tasted the air once again, and to his surprise, he caught a familiar scent. But he was disappointed to find that it wasn't the sweet and rich, milky scent that belonged to young kits. Instead, the smell belonged to StreamClan. *Why is there scent over here, across the boundary?* He wondered silently to himself, checking the air for a second time just to make sure.

That was when four cats emerged from the undergrowth, their pelts sleek and shining in the sunlight. He recognized the muscular clan deputy Sharpswipe at the head of the patrol with a sandy brown she-cat just behind him as well as two other she-cats he didn't recognize. One was a light brown tabby, and the other was light gray with a lithe and fairly thin build.

There was only one cat he knew of in this group, and that was Quickpaw, his sister, though she lived with her mother, separated from Sunpaw and Hazelstripe. The apprentice dipped his head to the patrol in a respectful manner, greeting them as politely as he could.

"Sunpaw! It's been so long since I've seen you!" Quickpaw called in a delighted squeal. But before she could step toward her brother, Sharpswipe gave her a warning glance that stopped her in her tracks.

"Why are you out here on your own?" The deputy demanded, regarding the apprentice with a skeptical look. "You aren't sneaking out against your clan's orders, are you?"

"No, no. Of course not." Sunpaw assured, but the deputy didn't look convinced. "Two of our kits have gone missing and I'm trying to help find them. Have you- "But before he could ask them about the whereabouts of the missing kits, Sharpswipe cut him off with a growl.

"Even so, you shouldn't be out here on your own. I'm afraid I have to escort you to StreamClan camp until one of your clanmates comes for you." He told Sunpaw.

"Wait, what?" The apprentice's heart began to race, sending tremors of panic through his fur. But before Sharpswipe could lay a paw on him, a high-pitched mew cut into the air. A mew that could only belong to a kit.

Chapter 19

Twitchpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

It wasn't Thornflame she had seen in her dream. She could conclude that now. Before she was a large gaping hole in the ground, dirt, and soil piled around its edge. And inside, ready to be buried, was Runningfox's body.

The kind-hearted tom had died during the night, and Twitchpaw hoped that by now he had made his way to SpiritClan. Perhaps he was even watching over them at that exact moment. Every clan member had gathered around to say their final goodbyes to Runningfox.

"Would you like to begin, Thornflame?" Burningstar asked the she-cat, Runningfox's sister. She looked on at her brother, her round, yellow-green eyes sad before finally nodding and clearing her throat.

"I always felt like Runningfox was all I had growing up. My parents never cared about us, and the thing I admired most about him was how he never wanted any other cat to feel how we both did our entire lives." She said, "He always made sure he could be there for any cat who felt like they had no one." She went silent and Tigernose, who was sitting beside her, spoke up next.

"I always appreciated how respectful he was to every cat, even those from a different clan and I wish every cat could act that way toward one another." The cobwebs that had been applied to the reddish she-cat's ear had been removed and dark, dried blood was visible across the torn edge.

There was a long moment of silence as no cat seemed brave enough to say anything else, but eventually, Skystreak broke through the eerily quiet moment. "He was a loyal member of FlameClan and I'll

make sure to make that known to every cat until the day I join SpiritClan." She said, with a look of defiance etched across her orange and white face, almost blocking out the sorrowful glint within her green eyes completely.

Burningstar finished off by saying, "He was very well-loved by all of FlameClan and he'll never be forgotten as long as our Clan lives on!" Many murmurs of agreement filled the clearing.

"Runningfox! Runningfox!" They all cheered, and then they filled the hole back in with dirt.

Twitchpaw couldn't believe that the tom was actually gone. It wasn't very long ago she had seen the tom perfectly fine and healthy, kind and helpful as he always was. That was before the battle at the river.

It was rare for Twitchpaw to feel angry at anything at all, but at that moment she was furious. Furious that Rainstar was so selfish to take the river for CliffClan and refuse to share it.

As the gathered cats dispersed to carry on their clan duties, Oddblaze approached her. "You'd best get ready for your ceremony today." He told her.

Confusion crossed her warm, amber eyes as she flicked an ear at him questionably. "What? But I don't deserve to be a full healer. Not yet."

"Of course, you do!" He replied, licking her shoulder in assurance. "I've seen you treat your clanmates and I know you have most, if not all herbs and treatments memorized by now."

"But Runningfox- "

"Is gone now." Her mentor cut her off. "That is *not* your fault, Twitchpaw. You're ready for your full name and healer status. You've been a great apprentice to mentor."

Twitchpaw dipped her head, giving her chest a few embarrassed licks. "Thanks," she said, sheepishly. "I've been taught by the best mentor."

Oddblaze let out a purr before pulling away from his apprentice and padding off toward their den. Although her heart still wrenched painfully with grief over Runningfox, she couldn't help but feel excited about her approaching ceremony.

The rest of the day seemed to go by at a painstakingly slow pace. She was just waiting on Reedpaw now. His warrior assessment was taking place at that very moment and depending on how he did would conclude whether they'd both be receiving their full names that night.

She was sure he'd do well though. Reedpaw was a skilled and capable warrior. There was no way he could fail his assessment. Such a task would be a breeze to him.

She returned her focus to the task ahead of her. Before her, waiting to be treated was Pounceflight. The FlameClan deputy had a large cut down her shoulder and another deep gash on one of her hips that she had received during the recent battle with CliffClan. Pounceflight checked them both as well as the other much more minor wounds along her flank to make sure they were healing well.

She gave them a good cleaning before checking the herb store. She snagged a few nettle leaves and marigold leaves and began to chew them, making a poultice for Pounceflight's injuries.

"I heard you are to get your full name tonight." She purred, her eyes flashing with pride. "Congratulations. I'm sure you'll make an excellent healer for FlameClan."

"Thank you!" Twitchpaw replied through the leaves she was chewing. She began applying the herb mixture to each of Pounceflight's wounds, making her wince. "Sorry," she mumbled. "I wouldn't want these gashes getting infected."

"No, no. I understand. There's no need to be sorry." She gave Twitchpaw a reassuring glance as she continued treating the injuries. "Oddblaze would tell me the same things. You two are so alike." She let out a small laugh.

Twitchpaw flicked an ear. They really were so much like one another. The nervous anxiety each of them would get, even though they would never admit it to one another aloud, and the way they both treated their clanmates.

I'm lucky to have such a great mentor to teach me. She thought to herself as she finished up. She nodded to Pounceflight, waving her tail to signal that she could get on with her duties as the clan's deputy.

She stepped outside the den to see that Reedpaw and his mentor, Tigernose had returned from the assessment. Excitement buzzed beneath her fur as she pranced toward him. "Reedpaw! How'd your assessment go?" She called.

Reedpaw's eyes brightened once he heard Twitchpaw's voice and he met her gaze. "It went well! Look what I caught while I was out!" He flicked an ear toward the pile of prey near the camp entrance. "The squirrel and the shrew are both mines and the mouse was Tigernose's doing." His eyes flashed warmly toward his mentor. "She wanted to contribute too."

"You better get to cleaning yourself up, young tom." The reddish warrior told him. "Your fur is a mess! You're nearly a warrior, not a kit who has had too much fun in the forest."

Twitchpaw knew Tigernose was joking, but she wasn't wrong. The tom's fur was ruffled and leaves and bracken were caught in his pelt, sticking out every which way.

"Hey, I worked hard to complete my assessment." He replied. "Of course, my fur is messy." But he began cleaning his fur anyways.

It wasn't long after when Burningstar called a meeting outside the cave system where the dens were located. Twitchpaw and Reedpaw stood side by side, only a few pawsteps before their leader, ready to receive their full names.

"Two apprentices are ready to receive a new status in the clan!" She called as their clanmates circled them. Twitchpaw caught sight of Thornflame who had never been very close to her kits, but

regardless she looked ever so proud of them. "Reedpaw, you have proven yourself worthy to become a full warrior of FlameClan. Tigernose had trained you well, and so I ask, do you promise to uphold the warrior code even at the cost of your own life?"

"I do." He answered.

"Then under SpiritClan's guidance, I bestow upon you the name Reedrunner!" Burningstar dipped her head to touch her nose to the new warrior's head and in return, he licked the leader's shoulder. Burningstar's brilliant green eyes flitted to Twitchpaw, who could barely contain her anticipation. "Twitchpaw, for many moons you have been taught and trained by Oddblaze and you have shown your clanmates that you are capable of treating them using your knowledge of herbs. Do you also promise to uphold the warrior code even at the cost of your own life?"

"I do." She replied, with a respectful nod.

"Then under the guidance of SpiritClan, you shall no longer be known as Twitchpaw, but Twitchtail!" She repeated what she had done to Reedpaw just moments before, touching her nose to the new healer's head to which Twitchtail licked her shoulder.

"Reedrunner! Twitchtail! Reedrunner! Twitchtail!" Their clanmates called.

She could hardly believe it. She was finally a true healer of her clan, and she wouldn't let them down.

Chapter 20

Tiny

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

It had been a few days, and still there was no sign of Lynx anywhere. But finally, today, the members of the Clowder had agreed they should check the twoleg village for him.

Tiny and Fox had been chosen to look for him along with Wolf and Mumble. They were at the edge of BreezeClan territory now, and although technically Clanless Clowder members were allowed to cross clan borders as they please, Mumble insisted they wait for a patrol to escort them, just in case.

It wasn't long until they spotted one. She didn't know the names of any of the clan cats just yet, but she saw a short-furred light gray she-cat at the lead. Her bright blue eyes were almost mesmerizing to Tiny as the sunlight and leaves reflected off them. Following her was a larger, pale gray she-cat with longer fur. But she had the same brilliant blue eyes and she was carrying a bundle of leaves and plants in her jaws, so Tiny guessed she must be the clan's healer.

There was another BreezeClan cat too, a skinny orange tabby tom, with white underbelly and around his neck, a red band that reminded her of her missing mentor.

"Mumble, Wolf." The she-cat greeted the two toms with a polite nod. "What brings you to BreezeClan?"

"Wolfcall. We're just passing through." He returned her greeting, dipping his head. "Have you seen Lynx around by any chance?" Mumble asked.

But the she-cat shook her head. "Sorry. I haven't seen him. Is he not with the Clowder?"

"That mouse-brain has been missing for days. I doubt he'll come back." Wolf sneered, receiving a glare from Mumble.

"We're out looking for him. If you happen to spot him, please tell us when you find a chance." Mumble told her.

"Of course. Good luck with your search." She replied, flicking her tail to signal that they could pass.

It wasn't a long trek to FlameClan from there, and it was easy to get to the village from there. The area was buzzing with twolegs. Standing around, walking, conversing with one another.

Luckily, Tiny even spotted a few cats darting around, so perhaps they didn't really pay attention to random cat sightings around their camp. One cat in particular caught her eye though. He was a long-legged black tom with a missing ear. But unlike the kittypets she had seen, such as Lynx and the BreezeClan tom, this cat didn't have a band around his neck.

He was skinny and lithe, and seemed to know his way around the village well, darting carefully around pillars, and timing walking twolegs from a distance before going specific directions. If they were to get answers about the village, this would be the cat to talk to.

The patrol had hidden themselves beneath a cluster of bushes, watching the oversized, stomping paws of twolegs as they passed by. Tiny, who took the groups rear slowly back away, trying not to make a sound as the rest of the group watched in silence.

With her small body, slipping out of the bushes soundlessly wasn't a very difficult task, and once she was free, she scanned her surroundings to search for the strange tom once again.

It wasn't hard to spot his dark coat among the bright village colors and she quickly darted toward where he sat on a tall fence, overlooking what lay below his perch. Tiny prayed to SpiritClan that it would take a while until the Clowder noticed her absence as she scrambled toward the wooden fence. She stared up the steep surface, wondering how she would make it up.

She flexed her claws, letting them sink into the grass beneath her and pull dirt and soil to the surface. Perhaps she could use her claws to climb up. Although she had yet to learn how to even climb trees. She let her claws grasp the thick wood, pulling herself up and up until her muscles screamed at her in protest.

With a grimace, she still hauled her way up, hoping she could make it all the way to the top. But then, she felt her claws slip, and panic gripped her like claws. She caught herself, but she knew her muscles couldn't hold her for much longer. She had to let herself drop.

She let go of the wood, feeling soft grass beneath her as she hit the ground below. She was lucky she wasn't high enough to get badly hurt. She was sure her side where she landed would at least be bruised though.

"Tiny, you mouse-brain!" Wolf growled. The apprentice turned to see the rest of her patrol racing toward her. She glanced toward the spot where the black tom sat, but he was gone now. "What were you thinking?"

"I- "But she was cut off before she could even explain herself.

"We came for Lynx, not for some silly game." Fox agreed. "Pull yourself together, Tiny."

With a defeated sigh, she followed them as they weaved through more bushes and twoleg dens. But Tiny couldn't help looking out for the black tom again at every moment. They continued through the village, searching for what seemed like moons in an effort to find Lynx. But they found no sign of them.

It was only when they stopped to rest when she spotted the mysterious tom once again. He had a scrawny-looking rabbit in his jaws and he seemed to be looking for a safe place to eat his catch.

Tiny wasn't going to risk losing this cat once again. So, she took a deep breath and called out to him. "Hey! Shadow cat!" She yowled. Shadow cat was what she had secretly been referring the tom as, though she didn't mean to blurt it out in front of him. She

immediately felt hot with embarrassment and she knew the eyes of mumble, Fox, and Wolf were all on her now.

The tom stiffened as he heard her though, glancing her way and immediately spotting her and the rest of her patrol.

"What do you want?" He asked around his prey, but it didn't sound threatening.

"Do you know a cat named Lynx?" She asked. "He's light brown with gray patches, long fur, a band around his neck?"

Recognition flashed in his yellow eyes just for a moment before he answered her. "Yes, I knew Lynx. He was mauled by a stray dog not too long ago though. His twolegs took him, but something tells me he's dead now."

"Dead?" Mumble's eyes were wide with horror. "Are you sure?"

"Seemed about right. I saw him lying in an alleyway just as the dog left him. Pretty sure he bled to death. There's no way he could have survived those wounds." The tom shuddered as if remembering the sight.

"But Clowder members have immortality. He can't have died." Fox retorted.

Tiny caught Wolf and Mumble exchange a glance she couldn't read. "We'll talk about this later." Wolf sneered.

Mumble nodded before dipping his head to the tom. "Thank you for your help. What's your name if I may ask?"

"Ebony. What about you four?"

"I'm Mumble, this is Wolf," he pointed his tail toward the annoyed-looking gray and white tom. "And these are Fox and Tiny." His tail drifted to where the two apprentices stood, side-by-side.

"It's nice to meet you. Are you new to the village? Or perhaps you're those wild cats that have been rumored to be running around." Ebony said.

"We're wild cats, or warriors as most of us are called." Mumble answered.

"Ah, interesting." They stood like that in silence for a few moments before the black tom spoke again. "Well, I'd best be going on my way then." And before any of them could say their farewells, the stranger darted away.

Chapter 21

Petalwish

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

She waited patiently outside her leader's den; her tail wrapped neatly around her paws. It was early morning and Rainstar was still asleep, as she always was, leaving her duties to her deputy until she finally rolled out of her nest.

She could ask Badgerclaw what had happened, but with her luck, the deputy would just snap at her and avoid answering.

The camp buzzed with activity around her. Stoneshade and Skyrunner were sharing a mouse in the clearing and a few other cats were gathering and preparing to go on patrol. She also saw Brackenpounce crawl out of the elder's den to bask in the early sunlight.

As she continued standing near her leader's den with her tail draped patiently over her paws, Badgerclaw approached her. The healer respectfully dipped her head.

"*Useless*wish. Whatever you have to say to Rainstar, you can tell me, you know?" The deputy's dark green eyes were narrowed into slits as she sauntered toward her.

"Thank you, but I think I should talk to Rainstar alone about this particular topic." She answered as politely as she could.

"Fine then. There's no point in wasting my time with you anyway, *Petalbrat*." She sneered. "Now if you'll please excuse me, I have a patrol to lead." And with that, the muscular she-cat stalked away, beckoning the gathered patrol members with a wave of her tail.

Just as the group disappeared out of camp, Rainstar poked her head out of her cave, startling Petalwish with her blazing amber eyes. "R-

Rainstar." She stuttered, trying to regain her composure. "May I speak with you?"

"Fine. Come in." She grumbled, vanishing into the cave once again. Petalwish found herself hesitating for just a moment before following her lead.

The stone was cold beneath her paws as she padded across the floor of the den. In the far corner lay Rainstar's nest, made of soft moss and bracken. As she let her eyes adjust to the darkness of the den and peered closer, she noticed feathers had even been added for extra comfort.

The CliffClan leader really was treated with such adoration by her clanmates. Were the other clan leaders treated in such a way? Surely not. She could tell just by the gatherings she had been to that the other leaders weren't nearly as self-centered as Rainstar was.

And it isn't like our deputy is any better. She thought to herself. If anything, Badgerclaw was worse than the leader. Not only did she crave the admiration of her other clanmates, but she also thirsted for power over her clan, and it was obvious to Petalwish that she could hardly wait to gain her nine lives and leadership of CliffClan.

Noticing Rainstar's impatient flicks of her tail and her expectant gaze that bore into her daughter's fur, Petalwish cleared her throat to speak. "I apologize once again for being gone so long yesterday, but could you by any chance let me know what happened while I was away?" She asked.

"Why should I tell *you?*" She hissed, accusingly. "*You're* the one who wasted so much time outside CliffClan territory."

"I didn't mean to- "But she cut herself off, taking a deep breath to try and calm herself. "I saw their wounds, Rainstar. It's obvious that something happened and as their healer, I feel that I should know about it." She mewed, referring to her clanmates.

"Fine then. The river by FlameClan territory, it's *our* river now. It'll keep us well-fed for *moons* now that we have it all to ourselves!" Rainstar let out a purr of pure pride. Petalwish stared into her eyes

for a long moment, searching them for any hint of guilt. But there was nothing. Only pleasure and satisfaction.

"Took the river?" She echoed, swallowing hard. "But FlameClan relies on the river as well to survive! How could you..." She choked out.

"They can go scrounging around the twoleg dens for all I care!" She growled, with a careless bat of her paw.

"Rainstar you *have* to let them share the river! Otherwise, they'll starve!" She pleaded.

The leader eyed her scornfully. "Are you still a loyal member of CliffClan, or did your little trip to the Flower Hills change your loyalties?" She challenged. Her tail lashed behind her and her teeth were barred to match her menacing tone of voice.

"I *am* loyal- "She began, but Rainstar cut her off.

"Then prove it!" She snarled. "For the next three days, you shall not show your face in camp. I want you to think over your actions and work out where exactly your loyalties lie!" She growled. "Only then, may you return, unless you find that your loyalties don't belong to CliffClan after all, in which case you shouldn't show back up at all!"

"Bet Leafpounce- "She began.

"Will be fine without you. I'll have Junipernose look after him during your absence."

Shock glistened in Petalwish's brilliant green eyes. After allowing herself a few moments to process what had just happened, she turned and left the den, heading straight for the camp entrance. She *was* loyal, and if Rainstar expected to prove herself in such a way, she would.

But as she left her clanmates behind her, she couldn't help but think to herself that perhaps she didn't belong in CliffClan after all.

✳🌥✳

The air grew chilly and crisp as the sun began to set, sending the sky into darkness. She was lucky that the nearly full moon allowed her just enough light for her night vision to kick in. Crickets sounded nearby and, in the distance, the hoots of an owl echoed across the rocky landscape. She made a nest for herself, although she didn't have time to make a secure den. It was a well-hidden divot in the rocks and she prayed that SpiritClan would shelter her from the elements until she could return safely to CliffClan.

Poor Junipernose. She began to think as she tried to drift off to sleep. *Even as an elder he can't catch a break, and it's all my fault.*

Maybe she wasn't meant to be CliffClan's healer. Perhaps she was meant to live in another clan. It was her own mother who had thrown her out and accused her of disloyalty after all.

She thought of Leafpounce and her other clanmates, trying to overshadow the dark thought. Surely, they would all miss her if she left after all. And in turn, she would miss them.

She thought of Branchtail, the shy and timid warrior who was excellent at hunting prey and tracking scents and was very loyal to his clan no matter what he was told. Then there was Stoneshade, always trying to make others happy even in the harshest of times. Brackenpounce, who despite her grumpy attitude, enjoyed telling stories and dearly missed her son, Grass. And of course, Junipernose who had taught her everything she knew about healing and was still willing to help her even though he had already retired from his duties.

And Leafpounce, who was once easy-going and cheerful, always radiating with happiness. It was too bad he was stuck in the healer's den now.

Worry tugged at her chest. *What if I never see him again?* If she actually *did* ditch her clan and decided she was no longer loyal to CliffClan, that was. Or worse. What if he ended up dying while she was away? He was already so sick...

Her dreams were troubled as she finally drifted off. This would be a long three days.

Chapter 22

Keenpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Panic surged in his chest and it felt as if his anxiety was trying to suffocate him.

All around him, his clanmates were going about their duties as they normally would, but they didn't know what Keenpaw did. He hoped he wouldn't have to worry about it so soon. That the skies would stay sunny for a while and he wouldn't have to worry about the unknown threat that still haunted him.

Beware the clouds that cover the sky. The words rang over and over again in his head, keeping out any other thoughts that tried to penetrate his mind. The sky today was dark and cloudy, the air crisp and chilly, carrying the promise of rain in the gentle breeze.

He tried not to let his panic show though as he and his mentor padded across the marshland, tasting the air for any prey scents. But as they kept walking, Keenpaw found it harder and harder to keep his focus on hunting. He couldn't even think about food with his nervousness churning his stomach.

Shiningsoul eventually stopped in his tracks, looking expectantly at Keenpaw. But the silver apprentice just looked on at his mentor, his head tilted just slightly in confusion.

"Don't you smell that, Keenpaw?" The large tom asked. A flash of worry crossed his dark amber gaze for just a moment.

Keenpaw parted his jaws and tasted the air, trying to take in all of the rich scents within StreamClan territory, but the crushing anxiety he felt was too much of a distraction. He cast Shiningsoul an apologetic glance before lowering his blue-green eyes until all he saw were his forepaws, guilt weighing heavily in his chest. "Sorry."

He managed to choke out. "I don't smell anything."

"That's alright, Keenpaw. I just scented rabbit up ahead." He paused allowing eerie silence to take over for just a moment before the large dark brown warrior continued. "Are you alright?" He asked in a soft tone of voice.

Keenpaw felt his pelt grow hot in embarrassment. Feeling flustered, he fluffed out his pelt and met his mentor's eyes once again. "What? I'm fine." He assured, but Shiningsoul didn't seem convinced.

"If anything is troubling you, you know you can always let me know about it, right?" The tom asked and Keenpaw replied with a slight nod. "What's wrong, Keenpaw.

The apprentice sighed, finally giving in. "I had a strange dream, maybe half a moon or so ago? I was in BreezeClan territory and found Breezestar. All he told me was that I should 'beware the clouds that cover the sky', whatever that means."

Shiningsoul let his thick-furred tail rest on his apprentice's shoulders for a brief moment in an attempt to comfort him. "Whatever it means, I'm sure everything will be okay." But it was hard for Keenpaw to believe, and he didn't even feel the slightest bit of reassurance.

✳🌥✳

Hunting proved to be difficult for him during his entire time out of camp so by the time he and Shiningsoul returned to their clanmates, all they had been able to catch was a scrawny squirrel and a mouse that had already looked half-dead before they'd even killed it.

Keenpaw was about to turn away and head to his den when his mentor beckoned for the apprentice to follow him with a few flicks of his fluffy tail.

The apprentice was led across the stone camp floor to Moonstar's den where they almost collided with the clan deputy, Sharpswipe.

"Ah. Sorry about that." Shiningsoul mewed with an apologetic dip of

his broad head.

"No worries. How was the hunt?" He asked.

"It went alright." The large tom answered with a shrug. "Keenpaw's been a bit out of it lately though, so we ended it early."

"Oh, that's terrible." The tortoiseshell tom cast a worried glance at the apprentice. "Make sure to get some rest, Keenpaw. Both warriors and apprentices alike need breaks sometimes."

"Thank you," Keenpaw murmured as the deputy padded away. Leaving him and his mentor at the entrance to the leader's cave. Moonstar emerged not long after though and Keenpaw assumed he had overheard their small conversation with Sharpswipe.

"Moonstar," the large warrior greeted with a respectful nod to the old leader. "Do you mind if Keenpaw and I speak to you in private for a moment?"

Keenpaw studied the pinkish-gray leader. It felt as if every day the tom looked even more frail. His rounded orange eyes looked tired and a bit downcast and he was very skinny despite the abundant prey they had in the spring season. The apprentice wondered just how long the tom would be able to lead them before he either died or retired and became an elder.

He hoped he could retire instead. Moonstar was such a wise and well-respected cat of StreamClan and it would be a huge loss if he were to join SpiritClan.

"Sure, come on in." The leader answered with a welcoming wave of his white-tipped tail. The den was small and cozy, but just large enough to fit Shiningsoul and Keenpaw as well as the leader. "What is it, Shiningsoul?" The leader asked once they sat and made themselves comfortable.

"Keenpaw here told me he received a dream," Shiningsoul said, letting his dark brown tail run along Keenpaw's spine. "He said Breezestar had come to him and told him to 'beware of the clouds in the sky'."

Moonstar's orange eyes clouded with confusion, but he shook his head. "I'm sure it didn't mean anything. Only Clanless Clowder members receive messages from our ancestors after all." He told Keenpaw.

"Are you sure?" The apprentice asked. "Why would I dream of Breezestar? I've never seen him before. And BreezeClan's territory seemed so real even though I've never been there."

"I understand. But we can't receive dreams. I'm afraid SpiritClan only contacts the Clowder." Moonstar answered. "Besides, clouds in the sky can't hurt us. There's nothing to worry about."

The two cats appreciated the leader and made their leave, but Keenpaw didn't feel any less worried.

Chapter 23

Sunpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Every cats' gaze snapped toward the sound as it split the air. Sunpaw tasted the air, trying to find where the kits could be. But the only thing he seemed to smell was the strong scent of StreamClan that lay at the border.

Quickpaw's eyes rounded in horror and her amber gaze met Sharpswipe's. "Do you think they found the river?" She asked, her soft voice quivering in worry. "It isn't safe for any cat, much fewer kits! We have to make sure they're safe!"

She bounded a few paces toward the direction of the river, but her mentor's snarl stopped her in her tracks. "Quickpaw! Get your tail back here right this instant!" He gave a sharp glare to the two other she-cats in the patrol before returning his attention to Quickpaw. "They're BreezeCan's responsibility, not ours!" The sandy apprentice opened her jaws as if she was going to retort something back at the StreamClan deputy, but she clamped her mouth shut once again without another word. Hesitantly, she retreated to Sharpswipe's side.

"But they're just kits," The brown-furred she-cat put in, "They're too young to understand what they are doing and it isn't right to just stand by and let the river take them."

The other she-cat with gleaming gray fur took a step toward her clanmate. "I agree with Oakshine. It's only right for us to help them, even if they belong to a different clan."

A low growl rumbled in the deputy's throat. "No. I won't permit it!" But The two she-cats as well as Quickpaw started forward. Sunpaw looked from the three she-cats to Sharpswipe for a long moment, unsure of what to do. But eventually, he joined the she-cats,

crossing the BreezeClan-StreamClan border. After all, they were his own clan's kits, so it was only right that he went along. And he sure hoped he wouldn't get in trouble.

As they approached, he began to hear the calming sound of rushing water. Well, it *would* be calming if Sunpaw wasn't so concentrated on whether the Fiercekit and Cleverkit were in danger or not. To be honest, he didn't even know there *was* a river there until now. He couldn't even hear its quiet roars from BreezeClan land, even from the border.

Another squeal split the air, full of fear and Sunpaw thought maybe a hint of pain, but he couldn't be sure. His pace quickened, although he kept behind the StreamClan warriors ahead of him. He hoped they were just playing or worried that they got lost and that they weren't in any real trouble.

They emerged from the deep undergrowth to a clearing with stubby-looking trees and overgrown plants along the outer edge. At its center was a river, long and wide like a flooded chasm of swiftly rushing water. And looking wildly around with his tail wrapped over his paws was Fiercekit, digging his tiny claws into a flat rock lodged in the center of the stream.

The small kit was trapped there, surrounded by nothing but endless water that was just waiting to swallow the kit. Sunpaw made his way to the edge, his paws splattered with mud and it took so much effort just to take a step.

At the opposite side stood Cleverkit, so close to the water Sunpaw thought she must have been preparing to jump in after her brother. But at the sight of the StreamClan patrol she froze and once her eyes met Sunpaw's her face seemed to glow with hope. The little she-kit squeaked, something at him, but the apprentice couldn't make out anything she was saying over the crashing sound of the river.

"You'll be alright! We'll make sure you both are safe!" He called back to her. He looked toward the patrol, giving them a desperate look. *Please help me save them!*

"You're the most powerful swimmer out of all of us, Shortstorm. Do you think you could fight the current long enough to rescue him?" Oakshine asked.

The she-cat nodded. "Yes, I can try that. Quickpaw follows the riverbank up until you see the log bridge. From there you can retrieve the other kit and bring her over here."

The young apprentice nodded eagerly. "Yes, Shortstorm. I can absolutely do that!" The sandy-colored apprentice bounded away.

"I'll go with her," Sunpaw added. "She's my clan's responsibility after all."

The two she-cats nodded, but just as he started sprinting toward his sister, he heard the deep voice of Sharpswipe shout something at the remaining patrol members, followed by the splash of water to which Sunpaw assumed was Shortstorm.

The log was slick and wet and he had to dig his claws into the decaying bark to make sure he stayed upright and didn't fall into the water. Every time his paws slipped, his heart lurched before he caught himself and kept on.

The two apprentices made it to the bank though and they raced to reach Cleverkit who was huddled in a patch of mud and grass, shivering with fear and eyes wide as she watched Shortstorm.

Sunpaw glanced toward the she-cat who had safely made it to the rock where she was now reaching to grasp Fiercekit's scruff in her jaws. But he returned his focus to the tiny she-kit, grasping her and carrying her back to the log bridge.

Quickpaw followed him from behind, making sure he was watching where he was going and helping him avoid particularly slippery spots.

Then, as he took another pawstep, he felt his forepaw give out beneath him and he swayed, feeling himself lose his balance. He dug his claws as firmly as he could into the fallen tree, but his luck seemed to be running out. His back legs slipped off first, leaving

him hanging just above the river's surface, with only his forepaws to hold him.

Quickpaw grasped his scruff in her jaws, trying to pull him up, but it was no use. She wasn't strong enough to carry all of his weight.

"Take Fiercekit!" He tried to tell her through his clenched jaws, and to his relief she seemed to understand him, reaching for the kit. And just as she did, he felt his muscles scream and his claws finally slip. He shut his eyes as he fell into the roaring water, the impact stinging his pelt like scorching claws. To his astonishment, another force slammed into him, knocking the air out of him. He felt his head break the surface and he gasped for breath, looking around to see what had hit him.

It was Shortstorm, coughing and sputtering as she desperately flailed her paws, trying to fight the current. But Sunpaw could see just how exhausted she was by the tired look in her eyes. But determination still flared like a blazing fire.

She nudged Sunpaw toward the bank and both of them were able to reach for the mud. Just as he had dragged himself up though, he watched the gray paws of the she-cat disappear as the current overtook her.

A gray blur shot past him, still trying to fight the water. But the river was too strong for her tired muscles. She wouldn't be able to beat it.

He collapsed on the mud, gasping and panting for breath. His muscles ached and the cold water that soaked his fur made him shiver.

Within a moment, the other cats were at his side. Oakshine seemed to be checking over him for wounds, and Quickpaw was licking him gently in an effort to warm him. Sharpswipe's gaze was frozen on the river as if he expected Shortstorm to miraculously break the water's surface and come tearing toward the bank. But from deep within himself, he knew the she-cat was gone for good.

But after everything, the kits were alive and safe now. Sunpaw just

wished Shortstorm didn't have to risk her life for them.

Chapter 24

Twitchtail

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Twitchtail nosed the shrubbery, trying to find the origin of the scent. From behind her, she could hear Reedrunner call out to her.

"What are you looking for? Do you see something?" He asked, licking his jaws hungrily. "Maybe a rabbit's burrow?"

"Pfft, you wish." She called back to him. "I think I smell some wintergreen."

Twitchtail heard him sigh. "I'll never understand how you can tolerate all of those tangy scents. And how do you even differentiate them all?" He asked.

With no luck in finding the desired berries, she looked back toward her brother and shrugged. "How do you differentiate prey scents?" She asked, shaking herself to dislodge any bracken that got caught in her fur. "Just as prey have a unique scent to them, herbs also have different smells. And you just have to memorize what type of injuries or sicknesses they can heal."

"I mean, if you enjoy that sort of thing, then I support you. But I'm happy hunting and patrolling instead." Reedrunner said.

"And I support you as well!" She replied. "You make an excellent hunter after all." She mewed, continuing her search for herbs.

"Well, maybe I could help you search? What do they look like?" He asked.

"Depends on the herb." She replied with an apologetic glance back at her brother. "Thanks for the offer, but I think I can find them just fine by myself. And besides," she added, noticing the disappointment that began to glisten in Reedrunner's silver-blue

eyes. "you have prey to look for."

"I know, I know, but the whole reason I was sent here was to make sure you would be safe." He said with another sigh. "I'll always get opportunities to hunt though. I'm just glad I can get a chance to spend some time with you. I feel like ever since we were apprenticed, we've been busy with our duties."

"That's because we have been. But I'm glad I can finally get a good chance to take a break and finally chat." She admitted, feeling slightly embarrassed. What would Oddblaze think if she heard her say that? Anyways, she was supposed to be out looking for local herbs to get them by before they had a chance to venture the Clanless Clowder's hills. She wasn't supposed to waste her time goofing off with Reedrunner, no matter how much fun it sounded compared to her healing duties. "How is it finally being a full-fledged warrior?" She asked, spotting a blackberry bush nearby.

"I can still hardly believe it." He said with a chuckle. "But it's going well. I feel so free now that Tigernose isn't watching my every move like some sort of hawk." He shuddered dramatically. "How is it now that you're a full healer?"

"It feels the same, to be honest," she answered, "minus the annoying apprentice duties and everything." But she didn't add that she actually preferred it that way. She didn't trust herself to do everything without Oddblaze there to assist her. *What am I going to do once he's gone?* She quickly shook the thought out of her mind. That would be moons away. She would still have a lot of time with him, or at least she hoped that was true.

Reedrunner stiffened suddenly, his head raised and his ears shoved forward, alert. Twitchtail followed his gaze toward the clearing that lay just a few paces ahead of them. "Squirrel!" He whispered in a shouty-excited way that made him look like a goofy mouse-brain. Reedrunner licked his jaws and softly made his way toward the prey, lowering himself into a hunting position.

Twitchtail watched in interest. The idea of hunting *did* excite her, but she was meant to be searching for herbs and she stayed back, knowing Oddblaze would be disappointed if she brought back prey

instead of herbs.

With a sigh, she continued to gather blackberry leaves from the bush, listening as the squirrel let out a shriek that was cut off abruptly, letting her know that the catch was successful.

Once she had acquired several blackberry leaves that satisfied her, she turned to join her brother. His silver-blue eyes were shining with pride as Twitchtail met up with him. Her mouth watered even though the strong scent of the herbs in her jaws overpowered any other smell.

"Nice catch!" She was able to mutter around the mouthful of leaves in her jaws.

"Thanks!" He replied, puffing out his chest. All of a sudden, an odd shouting-like noise split the air. Both cats' heads snapped towards the sound and Twitchtail's heart thundered inside her chest. *Twolegs!* The thought struck her like a bolt of lightning. Her paws felt like they were frozen to the ground and she stuck straight out behind her with the fur along her spine bristling.

Reedrunner stepped in front of his sister protectively as the tall figures of twolegs stomped toward them with heavy clunking pawsteps. Once they spotted the cats, they immediately reached toward them with outstretched paws.

The sandy-colored tom let out a hiss of warning and dodged the incoming paw. But the new warrior was too slow and within an instant, the twoleg caught his scruff in its long claws and stuffed him into a cramped den made of hard, silver mesh.

"Reedrunner!" She called, panicking.

"Go, Twitchtail! Get to safety and tell Burningstar what happened!" He called out to her as the other twoleg reached for her. She leaped out of the way, running as fast as her paws would take her. "Everything will be okay! I promise you that!" And that was the last thing she heard from her brother before she fled to safety.

And just like that, both he and the twoleg were gone.

"Burningstar!" She cried, her voice echoing off the stone walls of the cave once she entered FlameClan's camp. "It's the twolegs! They took Reedrunner!" Many of her clanmates had turned their attention to the healer, their gazes a mix of shock, confusion, and worry.

Burningstar strode out of the leader's cave, looking angry. "Those SpiritClan-cursed twolegs!" She growled. But her anger didn't last for long. She let out a sigh before mewing, "I knew this time would come eventually. Cats of FlameClan!" She commanded with a summoning yowl. "I'm afraid it is time we must move on and find territory elsewhere. The twolegs have taken one of our finest warriors, and I cannot risk losing any others."

Twitchtail looked on at her leader in complete shock and disbelief. Thornflame joined her daughter where she stood before her leader. "But what about Reedrunner? I've already lost my brother. I *can't* lose my son as well."

Burningstar's gaze softened and she let out a sigh as she gazed at the two she-cats. "I'm sorry, but we can't do anything. It's too risky."

Oddblaze stepped forward as well and chimed in. "We can't just simply leave a warrior in need."

"And *I* can't simply risk all of our other warriors." Came her reply.

So, that was it. Their territory was being left behind in an instant.

And Reedrunner along with it.

Chapter 25

Tiny

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Fox was fuming from the time they left the twoleg village until they got back to their camp. Tiny didn't blame her though. If the members of the Clanless Clowder had in fact been lying to them the entire time, she'd be a little mad too. But mostly, as she trudged along, she felt disappointed. Ever since she was chosen to be apprenticed to the Clowder, she thought she was so special. She wasn't going to be some normal warrior, she was going to have an important purpose, not only to her own clan but to all four of them.

"Tell us the truth!" She barked, as soon as they had made it to their den. "About everything!"

The other three members stepped out of the cave, looking confused. They all eyed Mumble and Wolf with searching gazes.

"Lynx is dead," Wolf growled. "They know."

"O-Oh..." Frost looked taken aback. The three apprentices had joined them now as well.

"Wait, but Lynx has immortality. How did he die?" Flint asked.

With a glance at Mumble, Grass answered, hesitantly. "Bounce still has it, but he's gone now. Lynx was never granted immortality. He was just a random kittypet who was promised a chance of freedom, so long as he acted as a Clowder member."

"Okay, so the four of us will be granted our immortality," Fox began, "but what about Tiny? What will happen to her?" She asked.

"She's received the same training as every other cat here. Even though she won't have immortality, she will still be a member of the Clowder." Came Mumble's answer. "Telling the clans would

cause unnecessary chaos."

"And if Tiny dies?" Fox growled. But there was no answer. Tiny could guess what would happen though. They'd have to recruit another cat, just as they did with Lynx.

Tiny stayed silent the entire time, too shocked to say anything at all. Her entire life ever since she had been apprenticed, had been a lie.

Perhaps I'm not so special after all.

A few days had passed since they had found out about Lynx's death and the full moon in the sky was evidence that the gathering would take place that night.

The ten cats of the Clanless Clowder waited in silence. It was unnerving to Tiny. They always had discussions amongst themselves, whether it was all of them as a group, or just her and the other apprentices.

The first clan to arrive was StreamClan and to Tiny's relief, she spotted her brother among the gathered cats. She immediately raced to meet him, licking his face, barely able to contain her joy.

But although Keenpaw looked happy to see his sister, grief and sadness glazed his blue-green eyes. "Tiny! I'm so glad to finally see you again!" He purred.

Even in the dying light, she was surprised to see how large the apprentice had grown. His shoulders were large and broad, and his coat was sleek, revealing rippling muscles here and there. He'd make a great warrior of his clan, Tiny knew that for certain.

"How is training going?" She asked him. "You've grown so big!" She reached up to bat at his ear, but he ducked to evade her incoming blow with a chuckle.

"It's going well, but I miss you Tiny. I wish you could be there to train along with me!" He mewed. "What's it like as a member of the

Clanless Clowder? I bet it's way more interesting here than in the clans."

Oh, it gets interesting. She thought to herself. "I'm not really sure how to think of it." She replied, but if she hadn't yet known the truth behind the group, her answer probably would have been different. She wished she could tell him how special she had felt or the excitement she would feel in her paws every time she would learn something new. But she no longer felt any of those things. Rather than special, she felt like a burden. And the exciting feeling she used to have turned to dread. "I-I should tell you- "but she was cut off as Rainstar led her clan toward the gathering cats, looking as annoyed as always.

"What is it, Tiny? I'm listening." The she-cat gave him an appreciative glance as she continued. "I... I'm not going to receive my immortality after all."

"Wait, what?" He asked.

Tiny told him everything, from Lynx's disappearance to Bounce still having the immortality that had supposedly been granted to the kittypet.

Keenpaw lowered his voice, making sure no other cat could hear him. "We can't just ignore that, Tiny! Bounce is still out there; we have to go find him and get your immortality!" He hissed.

"But... We don't even know where he's gone." Tiny said.

"I'm sure *some* cat knows a general direction at least." He replied. "We'll find him. I'm sure of it."

That was when Wolfcall burst through a tangle of overgrown vines leading her clanmates. A few inquiring mews rippled through the mass of cats which Tiny guessed were referring to Lightningstar's absence.

"Wolfcall," Moonstar greeted the deputy. "Where is Lightningstar?"

"Sick in the healer's den I'm afraid." She answered. "I'll be taking his place for tonight."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Mumble put in. "I hope he gets well soon."

"Thank you." She gave him a nod of appreciation.

The cats continued to make small talk as they waited for FlameClan to arrive, but they never did. And eventually, the gathered clan cats began to get tired of waiting around for them.

As the three leaders met up on the hill, Tiny was forced to rejoin the members of the Clanless Clowder and leave Keenpaw. As usual, Rainstar began first, not even waiting for any other cat to make an announcement.

"Prey has been running well in CliffClan this moon. We had a short skirmish with FlameClan over the river, but it is no longer a concern." She paused and Moonstar parted his jaws to speak, but Rainstar continued once again before the tom could even make a sound. "Also, if you spot our healer, Petalwish around, please let me know. She has proven herself to be disloyal to CliffClan and she's been cast out for the time being."

Tiny stiffened. She remembered Petalwish. How could she forget the kind-hearted healer? The she-cat had saved her life just a few days before and Tiny could scarcely believe a caring cat like her could have such bad intentions.

"Petalwish? What did she do?" Came a voice within the crowd.

"I won't go into detail, but I can assure you that she is nothing but trouble." The leader snarled.

"Prey has been running well in StreamClan as well. We sadly lost one of our warriors, Shortstorm though." Said the pinkish-colored tom.

Tiny shuddered with grief. No wonder Keenpaw had looked so sad. Shortstorm, their mother was gone. And Tiny couldn't even be there to say goodbye.

Chapter 26

Petalwish

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

"As you may know, Lightningstar has fallen ill and I will be taking his place until he is well enough to lead again. I have also chosen Cloudysky as my temporary deputy." Wolfcall meowed.

Petalwish made sure she stayed hidden in the undergrowth when she finally arrived. As afraid as she was of being caught, she didn't want to miss the Clan gathering, even if it meant going against her leader's orders.

Maybe I really am *disloyal to Rainstar.* She thought sadly. *Will I ever be able to rejoin my Clan?* She hoped so. It had only been a few days and she already missed the life of a clan cat. Living outside the camp was so lonely, and she was starving.

This sparked some mews of protest from within the crowd. "But she's a healer, is she not?" Called one.

"She was probably appointed because she's Wolfcall's kin." Petalwish flinched as she recognized Strikestorm's voice.

"Yes, she may be a healer, but there isn't anything code that states a healer cannot be appointed as a deputy," Wolfcall answered.

"As long as you feel she would be the best candidate for the position, I don't see anything wrong with it." Frost agreed with a shrug.

"How cute." Badgerclaw purred in amusement sending an uneasy ripple through the exiled she-cat's fur. "A soft healer with dreams of leading a clan." Cloudysky hissed silently in reply and gave the well-muscled deputy a cold glare that Petalwish had never seen her give any cat before. Perhaps getting promoted to second-in-

command gave her confidence that she hadn't yet reached before.

"One of our apprentices, Sunpaw, has also become a warrior for his brave efforts to save our clan's kits when they unexpectedly went missing." The leader went on, ignoring the two deputies and clearly trying to change the subject. "He goes by Sunstreak now."

"Sunstreak! Sunstreak!" The cats cheered.

"I've noticed the Clowder is down a cat." Sharpswipe nodded toward space where Tiny, one of the training apprentices, stood alone. Where has Lynx gone?" The StreamClan deputy asked.

"He hasn't been feeling well unfortunately so he decided not to participate in tonight's gathering." Answered Grass, though to Petalwish, he didn't seem so sure of himself. But Petalwish shrugged the thought off. Lynx was always making odd excuses ever since Bounce had passed on his immortality.

"Has the Clowder received any messages from SpiritClan by any chance?" Asked Moonstar. "It's been a while since anything has been reported." The orange healer's ears perked up at that. The leader had a point. It had been many moons since any visions or dreams had been mentioned at all.

"No. SpiritClan has been silent for a long while now," Frost replied. "But perhaps that's a good thing. That may mean we don't have anything to worry about in the future ahead of us."

There were many murmurs of agreement among the gathered cats.

"Does any cat know why FlameClan is absent?" She recognized her clanmate, Stoneshade's familiar voice, kind and gentle as always. It made Petalwish miss her clan even more.

All three leaders shook their heads and an eerie silence fell over the cats for a long moment before Rainstar finally broke it. "Well, I guess nothing interesting happened after all, then. We'll be going now." The leader bounded down the flower-covered hill and toward the crowd of cats below. With a wave of her tail, CliffClan was summoned to follow her away from the lush and hilly fields and

toward the jagged mountains ahead. Toward CliffClan territory.

Petalwish held her breath as they passed, trying to make herself even smaller in her hiding place. She let out a sigh of relief once they were a decent distance away.

"I think StreamClan will be taking our leave as well, and you should get back to Lightningstar, Wolfcall." Moonstar mewed. Both he and the deputy padded side-by-side down the hilltop until they reached their clanmates. Petalwish poked her head out. The nearest cats to her were the healers, who usually hung around just behind the crowd of warriors.

"Psst. Swallowflower!" She whispered, calling to the nearest healer.

The tom spun around, looking ready to pounce. His fur bristled along his spine, his tail fluffed up, and his pale-yellow eyes were narrowed in fierce determination. Swallowflower was never one to talk much, but he always looked irritated and she was told by Cloudysky that he had quite a temper.

"What are *you* doing here?" He hissed. "Come to persuade us to disobey our leaders?" He growled. "Go back to where you came from, *exile.* We don't want you here." He turned away as quickly as he had spun around to face her.

"Wait. I'm loyal, I promise!" She mewed softly. "Whatever Rainstar told you, it isn't as bad as you think." The old healer stayed silent with his back still to her. He didn't even flick an ear as she spoke. After a few moments of silence, she found herself uttering one more desperate word, "Please..."

"If you leave now, I won't tell any cat you were here." He whispered back to her, still facing the direction of his leader, who was gathering the other cats of BreezeClan.

With a sigh, she got to her paws, still trying her best to stay hidden. "Goodbye, Swallowflower." And without another word, she slunk off into the night, back toward CliffClan territory.

She was about halfway back to the familiar rocky landscape of her

own territory when faint mewling caught her attention. Her gaze snapped up and her ears were pricked. Was her mind playing tricks on her?

But then she heard it again, high pitched and faint. There were kits here! She lifted her head, sticking her nose into the crisp night air. There it was, still sweet and milky, as memorable as the scent of fresh catmint.

There they were. Just barely in the dim moonlight, she could see them, sheltered only by a few branches and some patches of moss here and there.

Where in SpiritClan is your mother? The healer thought to herself.

"Mama?" A tiny voice squeaked as she approached them. She was met with a pair of round yellow eyes. The two other kits at his side blinked awake as well, revealing their desperate gazes to her.

Petalwish glanced around, searching for any sign of a relative to the tiny kits.

There! Lying in the grass, she thought she could just scarcely glimpse what seemed like fur. She crept toward it with soft pawsteps. It was in fact a she-cat lying on her side. But as the healer got closer, she didn't see any movement from the figure at all.

She was dead.

Chapter 27

Keenpaw

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Keenpaw found it impossible to ignore the guilt that churned in his stomach. Sure, he left StreamClan without even telling any cat, but he would return soon. *I just have to get Tiny what she deserves.* He thought, and if anything at all, he wouldn't have to do his apprentice duties for a bit. He let out a sigh, closing his eyes for just a moment.

Exactly. This is just a small break from his clan for a while, and all the while he and Tiny would find Bounce and get what they needed. He was multi-tasking. Shiningsoul should be proud of him.

As they got farther and farther away from the familiar landscape, he felt his weariness grow. And he couldn't even imagine how Tiny felt. After all, she was so much smaller than he was. They needed to find a place to rest, and soon.

But there wasn't much in the open fields. Maybe a tree here and there and some shrubs and bushes, but nothing that could shelter them from the elements. He glanced toward Tiny only to find empty air. His heart pounded in panic as he spun around to find that his sister was trailing behind. She couldn't keep up for much longer, Keenpaw knew that much.

He caught up to her, resting his tail along her back. There was a tree nearby. Perhaps that would due for that night as long as it didn't rain at all.

"Hey, how about we rest there for the night?" He asked, waving a paw toward the direction of the towering oak not too far in the distance.

Tiny nodded weakly without a word. Her breaths came in quick

pants as she and Keenpaw headed in that direction.

In what seemed like a moon of walking, they finally made it, pulling themselves up into a canopy of leaf-covered branches and feeling soft bark beneath their claws.

It wasn't as comfortable as his nest back in StreamClan's camp, but it would do. It felt like he had fallen asleep as soon as he closed his eyes. For the first time in a while, he felt at peace, and he enjoyed it, even if it would only be brief.

He awoke in an unfamiliar forest. Trees towered above him so tall he thought they could touch the sky and the sights were so beautiful here. A calming stream that twisted and turned until it met up with a waterfall that crashed as the rushing water met it. Above him birds chirped, flying into an endlessly blue sky lit up by a bright and shining sun. There wasn't a cloud as far as he could see.

The loud cawing of a sparrow caught his attention and he followed it with his gaze. Something was falling ever so slowly as it beat its wings. He squinted to see exactly what they were. *Feathers!* He realized with a gasp.

And as quickly as it came, it ended, darkness pooling his vision once again. The last thing he heard as the cheerful birdsong died away was an almost familiar voice. But at that moment, he wasn't sure who it belonged to.

"What the sparrow leaves behind will show you the way."

The tom blinked open his eyes to find that the sun had already risen, making its journey across the sky as it did every day.

On another branch, Tiny was still asleep, and Keenpaw decided it would be best to let her rest after the long night they had before them. He climbed down the tree, deciding it would be best to do some hunting before they continued their long trek once again.

As he searched the land around him for any sign of prey, he couldn't help but think back to his odd dream.

What the sparrow leaves behind will show you the way.

Whatever it meant, he sure hoped it was obvious, because if he was honest, he had no idea where he was going.

In the light breeze that blew towards him, he could smell a rabbit. His jaws watered and he followed the smell, licking his lips hungrily. It was as if he could almost taste the warm prey as he tore into it with his teeth, licking blood from his muzzle.

He shook his head. If he wanted to *actually* satisfy him and his sister with a rabbit, he had to catch it first.

There, many pawsteps from where he was, a small rabbit loped, nibbling at the grass beneath it. Keenpaw lowered himself, crouching to match the position of a hunter, ready to pounce on its prey. He waited, with his tail just barely touching the ground, until the perfect moment.

Then he was off, paws flailing and claws unsheathed, ready to snag the animal's fur. He was successful, pinning it to the ground and snapping its neck within a moment. Grasping his new catch in his jaws he thought back to his first-ever catch, the squirrel that had ended up being eaten by a wolf.

If only that fox-heart could see what I've caught now! He thought triumphantly. *Take that, wolf.* As he carried it back to the tree where Tiny was, he couldn't help but wish Shiningsoul were there to see what he had caught. *He would be so proud.* At least Keenpaw hoped he would be, although it wasn't hard to please the large warrior.

"Oh, Keenpaw. There you are!" Tiny squealed and Keenpaw let out a small laugh. His sister hadn't changed at all since she was a kit. "Woah. Did you catch that all by yourself?" She questioned, her eyes round in amazement as she climbed down to meet him.

He lay the prey on the grass, silently thanking SpiritClan before he and his sister bit into the warm prey, scarfing it down with hungry bites.

Finally, after they had eaten, came the moment he dreaded most.

More walking. But just before he and Tiny got to their paws to leave, they spotted something dark in the grassy field. As they approached it, Keenpaw realized it was a feather, black and long, shining as the sun hit it.

"What the sparrow leaves behind will show you the way..." He mumbled out loud.

"What was that?" Tiny asked him, tilting her head slightly in confusion.

"Oh, nothing." He shook himself with embarrassment as he realized he had said it out loud. Now he had an idea of what his dream meant after all.

And now, he knew for sure where he was headed.

Chapter 28

Sunstreak

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

The day had finally come. He was a warrior, and he could hardly believe it.

Also, Slowpaw had finally woken up, but that wasn't the point.

For his efforts in rescuing Littlelight's kits, he had been allowed to take his assessment early, and somehow with the way Pounceheart had trained him, he passed and earned his full name. Sunstreak.

Sunstreak. Sunstreak. Sunstreak. Every time he heard the name in his head, he seemed to grow more and more confident, his paws tingling in excitement as he went on his first patrol as a full-fledged BreezeClan warrior.

They stood now at the border that separated their territory from FlameClan's and oddly enough, their scent was stale and fading as if it hadn't been marked in days.

"Should we check up on them? What if something happened?" Finchfrost asked.

Sunstreak, though he didn't say anything aloud, agreed with the messenger. As the days grew warmer and the arrival of summer drew nearer, the twolegs near FlameClan came out more often and they were at even more of a risk of getting caught in their clutches.

Hazelstripe, at the lead of the patrolling cats, nodded. "Yes, we should make sure they aren't in any trouble. And if they are, maybe we can help them."

But as they continued deeper into the unfamiliar territory, Sunstreak's hope of finding FlameClan gradually faded. There was no sign of life at all here, as if the entire clan as a whole had

dissipated.

And their assumptions were only confirmed once they made it to their camp. The entrance was empty, with no guards posted at all, and once they ducked through the entrance, they found a vacant and empty camp before them.

The prey pile in the heart of the FlameClan camp was nearly empty, consisting of mostly bones and the rotting limbs of different prey animals. Each den was empty, the only thing within the dens were nests, the moss old and in great need of a change. Where had they gone? Surely, they would have told the other clans if they were leaving, right?

"So, they left? Just like that?" Fleetpaw questioned to no cat in particular.

"It seems so," Hazelstripe replied. "Unless the twolegs captured them."

Sunstreak hoped that wasn't the case. His mind drifted back to his first gathering when he'd met another apprentice around his age from FlameClan, Twitchpaw. She'd seemed so nice, and so did her clanmates. Such cats didn't deserve to be forced into the life of a kittypet.

"Alright, we found what we came for." Finchfrost mew was edged with disappointment as she spoke. "Now, we should get back to our own camp."

Hazelstripe nodded, leading them back to where they came from.

He glanced around as they padded back into their own borders, just hoping that it was some sort of trick being played, or that some FlameClan warrior would jump out and explain to them what had happened. But the forest stayed eerily quiet, their pawsteps the only sounds they could hear.

So much for his first patrol as a full warrior.

They arrived back in their own camp to gloomy faces crowded in the center of the camp clearing, looking as miserable as ever.

"What in SpiritClan's name..." Finchfrost began, but her voice was cut off by a sharp gasp as the arriving patrol saw what lay before them all. Lying on the grass in a heap of lifeless bluish-gray fur, was Lightningstar.

The BreezeClan leader was dead.

Sunstreak could hardly believe what he was seeing. He squeezed his eyes shut, hoping it was all just some nightmare that he would soon wake up from. But it wasn't. This was reality. His leader truly was gone.

He glanced at the Invincible Stump. It was only a few days ago when his leader had been standing there, looking as healthy as ever as he granted Sunstreak his warrior name. How could his condition have worsened so fast? It seemed so surreal to him.

"Cats of BreezeClan," Wolfcall's commanding voice grasped every cat's attention. "it is with great sorrow that I announce our wise leader has fallen for the last time." Many saddened murmurs rippled through his gathered clanmates. "By tradition, we must hold a very important vigil for him. He served us well in life, and may he finally rest as a new member of SpiritClan."

"Lightningstar! Lightningstar!" Yowls and mews erupted within the camp, filled with many different emotions. Despair, hopelessness, thankfulness. The list went on.

"Now, we shall reminisce on our moments with our dear leader." She looked to Cloudysky. "Would you share first?"

The pale gray she-cat nodded. "He was so wise and loyal and I was so lucky to have him as my mate, and father to my dear kit." She gazed proudly at Wolfcall, who shifted on her paws, slightly embarrassed. "He will be missed, but remembered as StreamClan lives on."

There were many purrs and mumbles of the agreement as she

finished speaking.

The other cats glanced at one another awkwardly in silence, waiting for some cat to take over. But no cat did. Sunstreak guessed they were all still in shock by Lightningstar's sudden death to say anything.

"Well, I guess it's time we let him rest." Wolfcall touched her nose to her the limp leader's head, and mumbled just loud enough for the gathered cats to hear, "Until we meet again, my father."

And together, as a clan, they began to cover him with dirt.

That was it. Their leader was gone for good.

Chapter 29

Twitchtail

~ ✳ ☁ ✳ ~

Twitchtail was still depressed over what had happened to Reedrunner a few days before, but despite that, she forced herself to trudge on after her clanmates as they searched for new territory.

To distract herself from her grief, she had decided to think about what may have happened the night before at the gathering. Were they worried about FlameClan at all? She guessed StreamClan and BreezeClan may have been, but she highly doubted CliffClan did at all. Well, CliffClan's leader at least. If the clan's members were anything like Petalwish, she could assume that at least a few worried about the absent clan.

They had now stopped to rest for a bit though, and the healer hoped it wouldn't be long now until they found a suitable home for her clan.

"Hey, Twitchtail!" She spun around to see Pounceflight bounding toward her. "Smokeflight and I were planning to go hunting. You wanna join us?" She asked.

She shrugged, "Sure, why not?" If anything, it would distract her from thinking about Reedrunner so much. *I hope he's alright...* Living right next to twolegs for her entire life had made her see how terrible they really could be. She couldn't even imagine what her brother was having to go through. *Hang in there, Reedrunner!*

"Great! The more cats, the better." The deputy replied, distracting her from her thoughts. She flicked her tail in excitement and she was practically bouncing on her paws. Twitchtail found herself smiling. Even in all of the grief and loss the clan had been through recently, she was thankful at that moment that Pounceheart was still trying to cheer the other FlameClan warriors up and see the

best in their current situation.

Burningstar sure made a good choice when she chose to appoint Pounceflight as the clan's deputy. She thought, racing after Pounceflight as she and Smokeflight began to leave their clanmates in search of food.

It felt so good just to get a break from walking all day, even if she was still on her paws. Anything other than aimlessly walking was fine with her. She parted her jaws, taking in the scents of the landscape around her. Almost immediately, she could scent a finch nearby as well as a mouse. The three hunters split off in different directions to cover more ground and discover more prey.

Aha, I've found you! She thought triumphantly as her eyes caught the mouse she had smelled. It was nibbling at something, distracted from its oncoming pursuer. She licked her jaws as hunger clawed at her belly, lowering herself to the ground and into a hunting position. She dug her claws into the ground preparing herself. Then she leaped at it.

Before she could get her claws on it though, it scurried away and into some thick shrubbery, out of reach. She let out a sigh of disappointment, but all hope wasn't lost. She followed the smell of the finch she scented earlier, praying to SpiritClan it hadn't flown off just yet.

It must have though because as much as she tried to find it, the bird was nowhere in sight. *I sure hope Smokeflight and Pounceflight had better luck than I did.* She retreated to where she had left the two hunters.

Pounceflight was there when Twitchtail caught up, a fat rat in her jaws and a dead snake beside her.

"Woah, I've never seen a *snake* before!" She mewed, not even trying to conceal her surprise. She pawed at it, feeling the thick scales beneath her paw pads. A shudder went through her pelt. "Blech. Is this even meant to be eaten?" She asked.

Pounceflight shrugged. "I'm not sure. I've never exactly eaten one

either. In fact, the only time I've ever seen one is when I met a CliffClan hunting patrol at the border. Apparently, snakes show up there sometimes and one of their warriors caught one." She explained to Twitchtail. "I'd be careful though if you happen to see one. They could be venomous."

She shivered once again. Now she *really* didn't want to test her luck with the dead reptile.

After a bit of waiting, Pounceflight mewed, "I sure hope he's managed to catch a moon's worth of prey with all the time he's taken."

Twitchtail couldn't help but chuckle at that. "Do you think he's alright?" She asked in a more serious tone once she had regained her composure.

"Might as well go check up on him," Pounceheart answered with a shrug and Twitchtail followed the deputy towards the direction Smokeflight took.

Her heart began to flutter in a panic once she heard the hiss of a snake lurking somewhere and she jumped, her fur bristling in fear. But the sound was followed by a growl of a cat, which she could only hope belonged to the FlameClan messenger.

They burst through the undergrowth to find the silver-gray tom's paws flailing and before he was a snake, long fangs bared, and its neck raised as it stared threatening into the FlameClan cat's fearful green eyes.

Pounceflight leaped at it, immediately pinning it to the forest floor, careful to avoid its jaws as it tried to snap at her. While it was distracted, Smokeflight took the opportunity to claw at its long neck. It slumped to the ground, knowing it had been defeated.

"Are you alright?" Twitchtail rushed to the warrior's side to check him for any wounds. But he shook her away. "I'm okay. I made sure it couldn't bite me." He assured her. "Now let's get to the others. They'll be impressed once they see our haul!" He meowed proudly, puffing out his chest.

Smokeflight was right. They *were* impressed. And just as Twitchtail had been, they were nervous to eat the snakes the two hunters had caught.

Twitchtail felt guilty that she hadn't been able to catch anything. She had wanted to help Pounceflight and Smokeflight but perhaps she shouldn't have joined the hunt at all. *But at least it distracted me from everything else going on.*

As if no time had passed at all, they were on their paws once again, endlessly walking. But it wasn't long before they came across a clearing with a single tree towering above, reaching toward the sky with its branches. The clearing backed up to a wall of rock, so steep it seemed to Twitchpaw it would be impossible to climb, especially with the odd niches and nooks in the stone.

"I think this is it." Burningstar mewed, looking back toward the FlameClan cats behind her. "Welcome to our new home."

Chapter 30

Tiny

~ ✳ ✳ ~

It didn't take long to follow the mysterious sparrow feathers and reach the land that looked familiar to Keenpaw. Trees towered above Tiny as she walked alongside her brother and they were surrounded by rolling hills. It was breathtaking out here. All her life she had always thought the flower hills the Clanless Clowder lived in were the most beautiful landscape she'd ever find. But now, those didn't nearly compare to what she was seeing. Not far off, she spotted a waterfall, followed by a winding river that shimmered as the sunlight reflected off of its surface.

"This *has* to be it!" Keenpaw meowed. "Now we just have to find Bounce." But before they could continue walking to search for the missing tom, a low, throaty growl sounded from behind them. It was so sudden, it startled Tiny and both she and her brother spun around. It was a fox, Tiny could smell it now and see the ghostly yellow eyes peering back at her with seething menace. Its teeth were bared and it slunk out of its hiding place within a thicket of ferns. Quivering in fear, Tiny backed away, ducking her head submissively. But Keenpaw didn't seem to give up so easily. The apprentice lunged at the predator, pinning it to the ground almost instantly. But the fox wasn't going to do down without a fight. Tiny watched as it twisted to clamp its strong jaws around the silver tom's forepaw.

Keenpaw let out a frustrated hiss, shaking his paw free and flinging small spatters of crimson blood onto the lush grass. While Keenpaw was temporarily distracted, the russet-furred animal had freed itself from the grasp the apprentice had on it and now it was lunging toward him.

They both collided and were sent tumbling into the undergrowth of the meadow.

That was when a flash of black and white fur flew past Tiny, tearing at Keenpaw's attacker and opening fresh wounds on its flank. It let out a cry of pain, snapping at its new enemy. But its jaws only caught empty air as it was swiftly pinned to the ground.

Within a quick moment, it was dead, its neck snapped like a twig and its lifeless body slumped on the grass.

Tiny met the new cat's gaze, a warm golden-amber color. "Sorry about that. Foxes are a common occurrence here." He helped Keenpaw, who was still lying on the ground and catching his breath, to his paws. There was a deep cut on his forepaw as well as a gash on his side and some torn patches of fur here and there, but nothing too serious. "The name's Bounce. How can I help you?"

Both Tiny's and Keenpaw's eyes grew wide. "*You're* Bounce?" Asked her brother.

"Yes, last I checked that *is* my name." Bounce replied.

"We've been searching for you! We come from the clans." Explained Keenpaw. But that clearly wasn't the right thing to say. Tiny could tell by the way he narrowed his eyes, looking skeptically at the apprentice before him. "I'm Keenpaw, and that's my sister, Tiny." He pointed his tail in her direction before continuing. "She was chosen as a successor for the Clanless Clowder, but without you, she can't receive her immortality alongside the other apprentices."

Bounce let out a sigh and shook his head. "I'm afraid I can't help you." He spoke. "I had kits with my mate moons back and as soon as they were born, I was stripped of my immortality."

Tiny's heart dropped, her bottom jaw along with it. "But... if you didn't pass it on to any cat, where has it gone?" She asked.

Bounce shrugged in reply. "Who knows?" So that was it. They had traveled there for nothing.

"I... guess we'll be going then," Keenpaw murmured halfheartedly.

"Wait. Before you go, could you pass on a message for me?" The tom asked, his amber eyes pleading. "I just want Grass and the

others to know that I truly am sorry for what I did." His ears drooped, and Tiny could tell he really meant it. In that very moment, behind all of his confidence, she could clearly see all of the guilt and shame he felt.

Tiny nodded. "Of course." And with that, they parted their own separate ways.

About a day had passed and they finally reached the flower hills where the Clanless Clowder's camp was located. The sky was gray, covered in clouds and there was a light drizzle of rain as they padded on. For the most part during the trip back, the two of them were silent, only exchanging a small conversation here and there. Tiny didn't know about Keenpaw, but she felt hopeless. For just a moment when they had finally found Bounce, she felt like maybe she belonged to the Clanless Clowder after all. But now that she couldn't gain her immortality, after all, that small spark of hope had been extinguished once again.

"Tiny? Where have you been?" A voice suddenly came from the distance. She squinted through the thick undergrowth and vibrant colors of the various flowers around her. There, standing in utter shock, was Fox, and behind her sat the other three clowder apprentices.

"Oh, Tiny! It's so good to see you!" Flint purred, bounding forward to greet her and Keenpaw. "We were worried you'd run away for good!"

"Yeah, where *did* you go?" Badger asked, giving her a rather suspicious glare.

"*We* were willing to do what your mentors were too *afraid* to," Keenpaw hissed, stepping in front of his sister and blocking her from the others. "We found Bounce and got the answers we wanted."

"Bounce?" Inquired Feather, looking unconvinced. "How did you even know where he was?"

"SpiritClan led us." Answered Tiny. "They've been visiting Keenpaw in his dreams."

Fox eyed Keenpaw up and down. "This tom? And they didn't care to send you any dreams or visions?" She asked, looking back at Tiny. "It's very rare for any other cat to receive anything from SpiritClan besides us, especially if it happens more than once."

Keenpaw stiffened at that.

Immediately, the image of Lynx came back to her. According to Mumble and Grass, they got a slight tingling sensation in their paws once they touched their apprentice in any way and that was how they knew what kit would be suitable for the position. But Lynx wasn't a true member.

Tiny felt her lower jaw drop as she met Keenpaw's gaze. She really wasn't the special cat who was meant to be chosen for an important destiny. *She* wasn't the one receiving signs from her ancestors. *She* wasn't supposed to be apprenticed to Lynx at all.

The entire time the true clowder apprentice was meant to be Keenpaw. And she didn't realize until now.

Epilogue

Petalwish took a deep inward breath as she padded through CliffClan territory, making sure the two kits behind her were keeping up. She wasn't sure if she would be allowed to name any of them, but in her mind, she had already made names for them. *No matter what my clan decides to call you, you'll always be known as Lilykit, Tulipkit, and Dandelionkit to me.* She thought to herself as she ducked beneath an overgrown fern. *My little flowers.*

That was if Rainstar even accepted the kits and let the healer back into the clan's ranks.

Posted at the camp entrance looking bored as ever were Skyrunner and Stoneshade who stiffened in surprise at the sight of their old clanmate. She greeted them each with a polite nod as they escorted her into camp, marching her straight to Rainstar's den.

"Rainstar, Petalwish has returned!" Called Stoneshade from outside the cave entrance. "And she's brought, visitors!"

The healer ducked her head in embarrassment upon realizing that every cat who was in the camp had their gazes on Petalwish and the three kits she had with her.

"Well, well, well, if it isn't *Uselesswish."* Came the recognizable sneer of Badgerclaw. "And I see you've even brought us more mouths to feed."

That was when Rainstar strode out of her den, looking calm and collected as she looked over her daughter. "Took you long enough to realize where your loyalties lie." She scoffed, but her eyes softened as she saw the kit in Petalwish's jaws and the two others who crouched behind her. "And you've brought kits!"

Badgerclaw growled. "You should just throw them in the river and let them drown. They're just more mouths to feed, a waste of prey."

Rainstar blocked the deputy's snout with her reddish-furred tail and gave her a warning glance before returning her attention to Petalwish and the three new kits who accompanied her. "They're helpless kits now, but in a few moons they'll be warriors, great assets to our clan I'd hope." She purred. "And since you seem to love them *so much,* I'll even let you name them."

"Fine then." She took a lumbering step towards the two behind Petalwish, making one of them flinch back and causing her brother to trip over his own pause and fall to the ground. Badgerclaw let out a mocking chuckle. "Flinchkit for the little she-kit, and I think Fallenkit will suit the tom just fine." She turned to the other she-kit still in Petalwish's jaws, who let out a small squeal of fear. "And Fearfulkit will do for *this* cowardly scrap of fur."

"And now for the cat who will be entrusted to care for them until they are made apprentices..." Mewed Rainstar. "Any volunteers?"

"I think me and Skyrunner would gladly take up your offer, Rainstar." The healer met Stoneshade's eyes. Had she just been too oblivious to realize he and Skyrunner had become mates? Regardless, she was happy for the two toms and she was glad she could trust them to take good care of the young kits.

And most of all, she was happy to be back in her own clan.

✳🌥✳

The five apprentices along with their mentors stood along the shimmering cave stream, their hearts pounding in a mix of nervousness as well as excitement.

Well, Keenpaw's was anyway. From outside the entrance to the den, stood Tiny, watching from afar as Keenpaw would gain the immortality that was rightfully his.

That is if SpiritClan does in fact have it. He thought silently to himself.

"You all have trained hard over the past few moons, and we feel it is time you become full members of the Clanless Clowder and

receive your immortality." Grass purred, his yellow-green gaze glinting in pride as he and the other mentors looked over the five younger cats.

"While we may stick around for a few days to make sure things go smoothly, we will be leaving to our own clans very soon. But I believe you five will make a fine new generation for the clowder." Mumble added.

"We will contact our ancestors by touching our noses to the stream before you, with your eyes closed. Once you open them, you should reach SpiritClan where we can pass on our immortality to you." Frost instructed before she closed her eyes and touched her own nose to the running water. The she-cat went so still, Keenpaw was worried she might have died unexpectedly right there, but as the other three members followed her, he realized that wasn't true at all.

The five apprentices all exchanged a few glances at one another, then simultaneously nodded and dipped their noses into the stream. The water was ice-cold to the touch, and he seemed to feel an uneasy chill all the way down to his bones, but it only lasted for a split second before he felt warmth creep back into his pelt.

His eyes flickered open to see the spirit-like shapes of the four apprentices as well as the clowder members. The oldest apprentice, Feather went first, stepping toward Grass, her assigned mentor.

"Feather, you have worked hard and been determined even since you were chosen at the age of a newly-made apprentice. I pass on my immortality to you in hopes you will keep the clans at peace, no matter the cost." The older brown and white tabby touched his nose to his apprentice's head, and they stood like that for a few moments before Grass pulled away, allowing Feather to retreat to where she stood alongside the other apprentices.

Fox went next, and Flint after, followed by Badger. And finally, it came down to Keenpaw.

The one apprentice without a mentor.

Then, from the shadow of the cluster of trees that made up SpiritClan's hunting grounds, came a familiar golden tom. A cat he only saw in his ominous dreams. This was Breezestar.

"After Bounce showed his disloyalty and abandoned the Clowder, his immortality did not disappear forever. Nor did it go to Lynx, his chosen replacement." His cool green eyes met Keenpaw's. "Instead, it went to the future Clanless Clowder member. It went to you, Keen."

The apprentice only looked on in confusion. "You mean... I've had it the entire time?" He inquired, and the former BreezeClan leader nodded.

"I trust you will keep the peace between the four clans, no matter the cost." He purred. "Good luck, to all of you." He mewed, letting his gaze fall on each of the other four apprentices, now full-fledged Clanless Clowder members. "We must part ways now, but I trust I'll be seeing the four of you again sometime."

"Wait. If it's alright, I'd like to receive a warrior name instead of being stripped of my current name." He mewed, feeling embarrassed as he said it. "I think it should be a reminder of the clowder's mistake and how they lied about what happened to Bounce."

"If you insist, then I don't see why not," Breezestar replied. "By the power of SpiritClan, I bestow upon you the name of a warrior. From this moment forward you will no longer be known as Keen or Keenpaw, but Keenclaw."

"Keenpaw! Keenpaw!" Came the cheers of both mentors and newly made Clanless Clowder members.

And with that, his darkness began to pool into his vision, but as he felt his contact with SpiritClan fading, he swore he could hear something very faint.

"Beware the clouds that cover the sky."

It was dark out by the time Wolfcall and Cloudysky set out towards the flower forest where the Crystal River was located. The dark clouds in the sky obscured the starlight and the occasional flash of lightning split the sky every so often, followed by the growl of thunder. There was a storm on the horizon, but Cloudysky hoped they'd be back in their own territory by the time it started raining.

The ground beneath her paws was damp from the light drizzle before, and it was hard to make out any of the forest's scents. A howl echoed from within the distance, catching the two cats by surprise. The pack of wolves who lived nearby them was out and about now and Cloudysky prayed to SpiritClan they wouldn't see them.

"You'll make a great leader, Wolfcall." Cloudysky purred. "I'm proud of you."

"Thanks," the deputy replied. "I don't know how I'll be able to go on after Lightningstar's death though. I still miss him, and it's not like I can lead his clan as well as he did."

"Don't think such nonsense," Cloudysky replied, shaking her head and narrowing her eyes at her daughter. "If anything, you'll surpass Lightningstar. You're his daughter after all. You have *his* natural leadership skills and you have *my* willingness to do what's right."

"I'm glad I can trust you as both my mother and my deputy to make sure I'm making the right choices for BreezeClan." She met Cloudysky's gaze, giving her an appreciative look.

"Of course. I'll be right by your side until the day I die." She vowed, bowing her head to the light gray she-cat.

From behind them, a low growl came so suddenly and before they could even turn to see where it came from, Wolfcall was slammed to the ground by a large shadowy figure.

Wolf! Cloudysky ducked away and out of its path, watching as it tore at Wolfcall's flesh and covering her ears to try and drown out the sound of her pained yowling. She would have helped her daughter, but if she did, she would have risked her own life, and if

they both died, who would take up the leadership of her clan?

She waited until the yowling stopped and the wolf had slunk away and out of sight. The Clanless Clowder wasn't far now. She could make it there safely as long as she was quick. She poked her head out of her hiding place and immediately caught sight of Wolfcall, her body unmoving and crimson blood oozing from her wounds.

She flinched, feeling guilt weigh on her like a pile of stones. Trying her best not to look at the dead deputy, she sprinted away and toward the flower-covered hills as the rain began to pour down on her.